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FA damns Italian police for Rome violence

By ADRIAN LEE AND RICHARD OWEN IN ROME

THE Football Association yesterday accused the Italian police of "deliberate intimidation" and "extreme provocation" in a damning report into the violence that marred England's World Cup match in Rome a fortnight ago.

The condemnation threatened to blow up into a diplomatic storm last night as the Italian Embassy in London dismissed the investigation as a "one-sided whitewash".

As Italian diplomats continued to blame "English hooligans" for causing the violence seen by millions on television, the FA stood by its dossier.

Jack Straw, the Home Secretary, refused to be drawn into the mounting stormy but said he would meet the FA to discuss the investigation.

An Italian spokesman said the report of the Italian Interior Ministry's own inquiry would be released next week but added: "It is a nonsense to blame our police when they had to face drunken hooligans throwing missiles." He said 77 people had been injured by English fans and four police-men were seriously injured.

The FA dossier was compiled from the graphic testimony of 1,500 supporters who described how they faced baton charges, insults and were spat at. One complainant was aged 12. The FA accused the

Italian authorities of ignoring advice from British police experts who were sent to control a small number of known hooligans. Instead the Italian organisers sold tickets to English fans for the wrong end of the stadium, it said.

When both sets of fans began bombarding each other with seats and bottles, the report said, the police only acted against the English supporters.

The report said stewarding in the 82,000 all-seater stadium was almost non-existent and elementary crowd safety procedures were abandoned amid chaos. The FA called for countries which stage international matches to agree to a "basic" standard of organisation.

Concern grew last night that the report may affect the next Anglo-Italian encounter, when Manchester United fans travel to Turin for the tie against Juventus. FA sources said they did not think it right to sit on this report until after that game. They agreed that the behaviour of the police and the travelling fans will receive "unprecedented scrutiny".

David Mellor, head of the Football Task Force, welcomed the report and agreed more had to be done to prevent known troublemakers following the England team abroad.

In Rome a spokesman for Mario Pescante, chairman of the Italian Olympic Committee, charged that British officials were inconsistent: "They say one thing to us and another to the British public." The Italian Football Federation said it would study the report carefully. The chief of police, Rino Monaco, declined to comment.

Francesco Rutelli, Mayor of Rome, said there was "no basis" for accusations that the police were brutal. "On the contrary, they contained a dangerous situation which could have got out of hand".

Football reports, pages 35-39



Cherie Blair escorts Bhumika Anand, wife of the Commonwealth Secretary General, through a "Family Festival" marquee in Edinburgh

Personal video image of Blair's Britain

By DOMINIC KENNEDY AND SHERLEY ENGLISH

TONY BLAIR put his personal stamp on the new image of Britain as a young, vibrant nation yesterday with a remarkable promotional video shown to millions of television viewers across the Commonwealth.

The eight-minute broadcast, a visual directory of "who's in" in Cool Britannia - and, by omission, "who's out" - was the centrepiece of a 90-minute session of story, music and

dance, as well as traditional speeches to representatives of 51 countries meeting in Edinburgh. The video included Blairite choices such as Ted Baker, his children's favourite shirt designer, and recent Downing Street celebrity guests Richard Branson, the Virgin boss, and Noel Gallagher of Oasis.

The relaunch of New Britain was more of a facelift than a makeover. Such is the tyranny of youth that Desmond Lynam's was the only grey hair to be spotted among

dozens of unkempt pop singers and brash film stars. Nobody was allowed to be bald. The video, which included scenes from the film about male strippers, *The Full Monty*, and excerpts from the Spice Girls' *Wannabe* video, was watched in silence by Commonwealth leaders.

But its target audience was the people of the Empire's former subject nations, whose memories of the British are dominated by marching bands, superior colonialism taking tiffin, drinking gin and tonic and playing polo.

The video, produced by Pete Bolton of Spectrum, introduced Mr Blair's speech to the conference. It began with a Union flag surrounded by the internet address.

Against a background of techno music, graphics were rapidly displayed on the themes of technology, trade, education, the environment and culture. First, a gleaming CD faded into pictures of a telescope five times more powerful than Hubble, which can see the surfaces of stars. Designed, of course, in Britain.

Next came a stroke patient having a life-saving operation, a jet plane with Rolls-Royce turbine blades capable of withstanding 1000C, and a

British Telecom device to identify people by their irises.

The segment about trade began with a £1 coin, the image of the Queen's head being the only reference to monarchy in the entire video. Pills were seen on a production line as the pharmaceutical industry's achievements were lauded. Also British were the world's busiest airport (planes at Heathrow), most Formula 1 cars (eight corners at Grand Prix), most European retailers (people buying oranges at supermarkets), and

a third of the world's foreign exchange business (City traders waving their arms).

The environment section included the Eden Project to create a giant greenhouse in Cornwall and an environmentally-friendly Sainsbury's juggernaut. Education was illustrated by children using computers and an Open University student writing an essay. Finally, culture highlighted fashion, film, architecture, rock and design.

New Britain, page 13

Anyone for tennis with our Tony?

By PHILIP DELVES BROUGHTON

WHEN Tony Blair met the Commonwealth heads of government yesterday in Edinburgh he was looking not at their sashes and gongs but rather for a specific snap in the hips, strength in the leg and a cool, unsweaty palm.

"The Prime Minister is looking for a tennis partner," said one of his aides yesterday. "He will choose one after he has met them all today."

The Commonwealth leaders will be adjourning on Sunday to St Andrews where golf, messages, tennis and football will be on offer. In the hotels of Edinburgh, Mr Blair's challenge has been met with vigour. High commissioners and advisers are urging their bosses into toe-touching, leg curls and short sprints.

Typical is the attitude of the Bahamians, whose President, Hubert Ingraham, though in the mid to low-5ft range, is up for it. "He is a bit short," says a Bahamas High Commissioner official, "and not so athletic. Golf is really his game, but I am sure he could play tennis if he needed to."

President Masire of Botswana is also game. "He is in his seventies but very athletic," his High Commissioner says. "He keeps fit by herding buffaloes, that sort of thing."

Nobody, it seems, is prepared to say his head of government is any less than a new Linford Christie. Dr Keith Claudius Mitchell, Grenada's

Continued on p2, col 2



Times busiest Internet site

Readers of the Internet editions of *The Times* and *The Sunday Times* called up more than 11.3 million pages in September, making the Internet editions of the two newspapers the busiest website in Britain, according to the Audit Bureau of Circulation. The website also recorded its one-millionth reader registration since its launch on January 1, 1996.

The Times is online at: <http://www.the-times.co.uk>

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Rector found guilty of affair with married parishioner

By RUSSELL JENKINS

THE Rector of Benllech last night faced being stripped of his holy orders after an ecclesiastical court in Wales found he had had an adulterous six-year affair with a married parishioner.

After a five-day hearing, the three judges on the Church in Wales's Provincial Court declared that the Rev Clifford Williams, 49, had given "just cause for scandal or offence".

Mr Williams, who was wearing a dog collar for the first time in court, has pledged to appeal to the European Court of Human Rights. The church court had been petitioned by the Bishop of Bangor, the Right Rev Dr Barry Morgan, to inquire whether Mr Williams behaved in such a way as to give "just cause for scandal or offence".

Mr Williams had to answer four formal charges that he conducted an adulterous six-

year affair with Iris Green, 56, and that he engaged in "close relations of improper familiarity" with another married parishioner, Anne Williams. The other charges alleged that Mr Williams lied to the bishop over the nature of the photographs taken of him with Mrs Green on the Malvern Hills, and that he disobeyed the bishop's order to stop conducting church services at St Andrew's Church, Benllech.

The court, which last sat in public in 1938, heard Mrs Green, a music teacher who moved to Tyn-y-Gongl on Anglesey in 1980, complain that the rector pursued her for sex and had other lovers. She claimed he seduced her on her sofa when she was still vulnerable after the death of her teenage son in a motorcycle accident. As the relationship soured, he stalked her and plagued her with phone calls.

"He preys on women, particularly women who are in vulnerable positions," she said. Questioned on where they had sex, she replied: "There were so many: in his house, in his living room, bedroom, practically every room in my house, the garden, in the caravan, on the beach and in his car. Is that enough?"

Yesterday the proceedings were interrupted so that a sworn affidavit from Gwenda Williams, the rector's wife, could be read out. It directly rebutted evidence given under affirmation by the rector on Thursday that he and his wife were still living fully as man and wife.

It read: "This is not true. Since September 1996 I have slept in a separate bedroom. We do not have a sexual relationship, neither do I cook. Continued on page 5, col 5

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THE SATURDAY TIMES Now Bigger and Better

The Saturday Times is now bigger and better, with expanded SPORT and more award-winning WEEKEND MONEY pages. The enhanced BUSINESS pages start on page 27. And the expanded WEEKEND contains more travel including skiing.

taste of the times

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TODAY IN THE TIMES



'Sister Frigidaire has returned as Mellow Mother'

Tom Rhodes on Hillary Clinton at 50 - page 9



'My commitment to forgiveness does not come from my experience as a victim'

Valerie Grove meets Mary McAleese - page 21



'Charlie Whelan, the Chancellor's press secretary, has been more spinned against than spinning'

Michael Gove traces a Labour disaster - page 19

Brown to give EMU line on Monday

The Chancellor will seek to end the speculation with a statement to the Commons, while Mr Hague's new policy is under fire, write **Andrew Pierce and Jill Sherman**

GORDON BROWN will seek to end the damaging speculation about the Government's position on membership of a single European currency in a statement to the House of Commons on Monday.

The Treasury said that the Government was acting "decisively to stop speculation by making a statement to Parliament at the earliest possible opportunity".

Strict secrecy surrounds the contents of the Chancellor's statement, to be made on the day MPs return to Westminster after the summer recess. But Mr Brown will rule out entry in the first wave in 1999. The statement is also expected to reflect Mr Brown's view, as signalled in his Times interview last week, that Britain cannot enter during the lifetime of this Parliament.

The Tories claimed that they had forced the Government into making

a Commons statement but the Conservatives' own internal difficulties on Europe resurfaced yesterday. Kenneth Clarke, the former Chancellor, led the fightback against the Shadow Cabinet decision to harden its opposition to a single currency by opposing entry in this Parliament and the next. Peter Temple-Morris, a senior MP, said he could not support the new position.

The outline of Mr Brown's statement was discussed by the Cabinet on Thursday but the Prime Minister has issued an edict that there be no briefing in advance because the text is so market-sensitive. Confirmation of the statement came after the London markets had closed last

night. A Treasury spokesman said: "No official, adviser or Minister will speak on behalf of the Government about the details of the statement beforehand."

Minutes after the announcement of the statement a Downing Street spokesman said that the speech would set out a pragmatic approach, with the Government facing up to "hard choices". The spokesman said: "The dithering of the previous Government will not be repeated."

The early statement to Parliament, which had been repeatedly requested by the Opposition, was announced after damaging speculation on the markets following con-

flicting reports about the Government's policy.

The Prime Minister, who is in Edinburgh for the Commonwealth summit, is heavily involved in the drafting of the wording, which has not been finalised. The outline was reported to the Cabinet on Thursday.

Ministers hope that the clarification of the Government's position will stop nerves jangling in the City and silence Opposition critics who have made political capital from the Government's apparent turmoil.

The pressure was maintained on the Government yesterday when Sir Leon Britan, the European Com-

missioner, gave warning that "a Dutch auction" in Euroscepticism was damaging Britain's national interest. Sir Leon said that the Government had undermined its chances of taking a leading role in Europe through the leaks and confusions over its attitude to EMU. "There is no proper debate," Sir Leon said.

He also turned his fire on the Tories. Sir Leon said: "Even the most far-sighted politician could not possibly rule out joining something of such magnitude in the future." Sir Leon, who was speaking at a conference in London on economic and monetary union, added: "How can opposition to the EMU be

frozen in stone - irrespective of international markets? If the Tories want to campaign against the single currency at the next election, then they are practically making decisions until 2007 - surely that is contrary to rational policy?"

His comments were echoed by Mr Clarke, in an ominous development for William Hague's prospects of Tory unity. Mr Clarke, speaking on Radio 4's *The World at One*, said that he preferred the recently agreed Tory formula that Britain should not join EMU "for the foreseeable future" and regretted that the Shadow Cabinet had changed it again. "I don't know why the issue was revisited. I hope it not just to please some Eurosceptics who insisted on different wording."

Michael Gove, page 19
John Lloyd, page 22

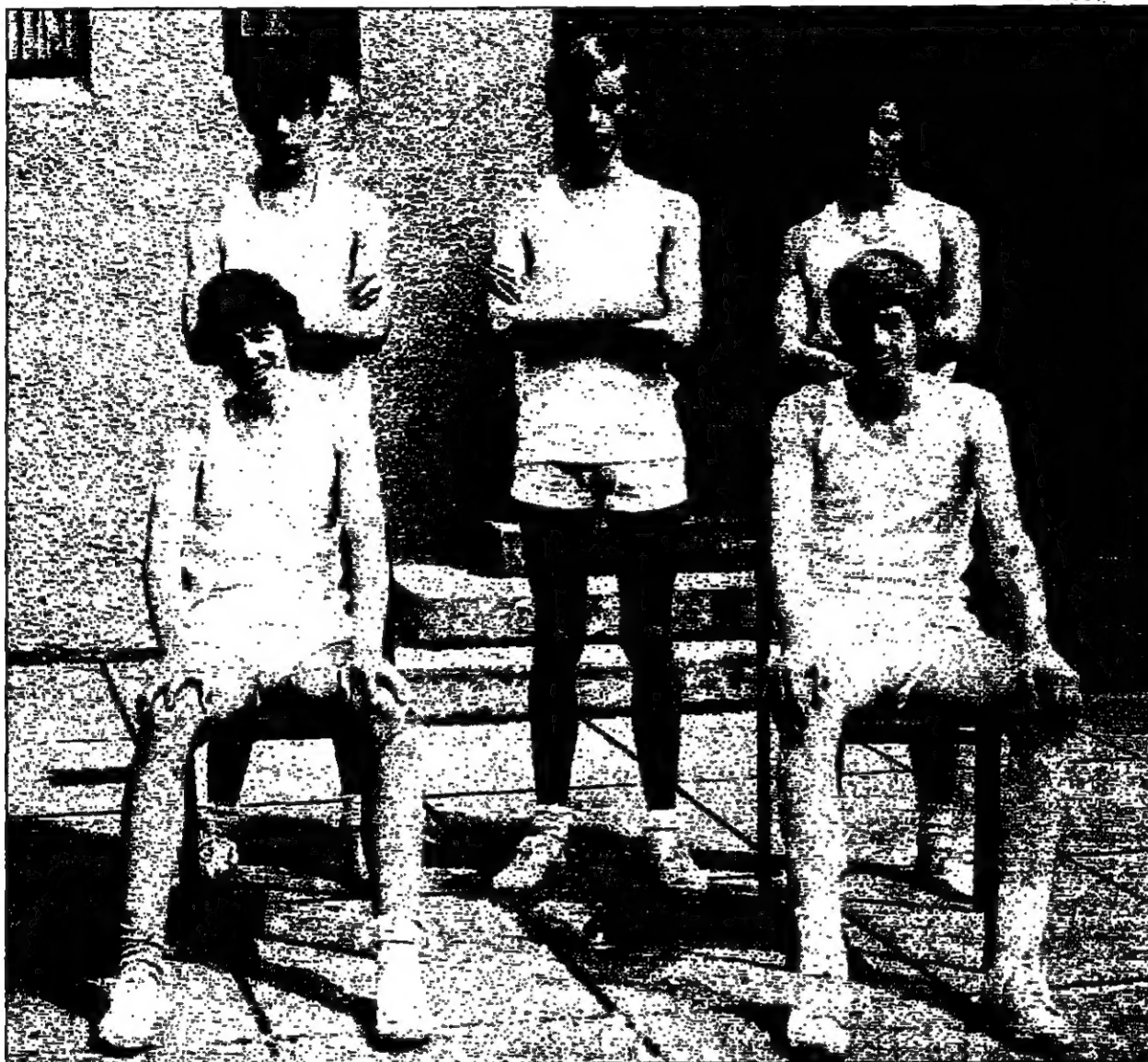
Tony's tennis

Continued from page 1
Prime Minister, is "a very fit man" according to his office. "Very accomplished at cricket and football, but maybe not so good at tennis." Even the Indians are keen to push their man, Inder Kumar Gujral, Prime Minister and 5ft 6in of lithe muscle. He is "extremely fit for his age," a giggle official said. "But perhaps he is a little old for the more vigorous sports." He is 78.

Mr Blair seems to revel in putting his physical prowess to public test. At the Amsterdam summit this year, when all the European Union heads of government were given a bicycle to ride, Mr Blair streaked off ahead of his fellow ministers. Germany's Helmut Kohl, by contrast, looked from belly to machine and said "Nein".

However, Mr Blair may just find his opponent, Eriya Katagaya, Uganda's Prime Minister, is a demon server with searing groundstrokes. He remains a prince of the sword into his 50s.

"Just one thing," the Ugandan High Commissioner says. "He is a different size to your Prime Minister." Not another titch? "Oh no. He is big. Bigger than big Tony? Oh yes. Much bigger. He is a very big man." The only problem is that he has left his shorts and racquet back home. Perhaps a vindictive Tory could oblige.



The chief executive of Cairn Energy, Bill Gaminiell, front right, in a rather unkind gesture yesterday, produced an old school photograph of himself and a young Tony Blair, front left, in their Pettes College basketball gear

Experts at odds over dangers of eating red meat

By NIGEL HAWKES
SCIENCE EDITOR

FRESH doubts have been cast on government advice that eating red meat can increase the risk of cancer.

The committee responsible has yet to agree on the final wording of its report, even though the recommendations have been published in a press release from the Department of Health on September 25.

The department last night denied that any changes were planned in the wording of the key advice on red meat, but there are known to be disagreements within the Committee on the Medical Aspects of Food Policy (COMA) over how strong it should be.

The original version, written by a panel headed by Professor Alan Jackson of Southampton University, favoured warning only those who eat 140 grams or more of meat a day. This advice was incorporated into the report and sent to the printer. But at the last moment two members of the full committee demanded stronger language.

One of them was Professor Philip James, director of the Rowett Research Institute in Aberdeen, the nutrition expert responsible for producing a report at Tony Blair's request on how the new Food Standards Agency should be organised. After Professor James objected, copies of the report were scrapped and a new version prepared incorporating stronger advice. This said that anybody eating the current average intake of red meat or above (90 grams a day) "should consider a reduction".

The revised version was discussed at a COMA meeting on October 21. Professor Jackson, with the backing of his panel, is understood to have expressed reservations about the new wording.

He indicated that the advice his panel had originally drafted was as much as the scientific evidence justified. The result is a stalemate, with no date for the final publication of the report and no clarity over what government advice on meat really is.

A Health Department spokeswoman said yesterday: "COMA want to make sure that the wording of their recommendation cannot be misunderstood by anyone, is scientifically accurate, and is useful to health professionals and consumers." The latest muddle will infuriate ministers who had already been embarrassed by the need to halt printing of the first version. But it reflects intense battles going on within Whitehall over food policy.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Body is found in hunt for boy

Detectives investigating the disappearance of Jamie Lavis, eight, said they had unearthed the remains of a child in woodland near to Reddish Vale Golf Course at Stockport, Manchester. The boy disappeared on May 5. Darren Vickers, 27, a bus driver, has been charged with the boy's abduction.

Dome answers

Peter Mandelson is to be questioned once a month in the Commons about the Government's plans to mark the Millennium. The Minister without Portfolio, who will answer questions on the project for five minutes each month, makes his first appearance on November 10.

Snap happy

Eleven baby West African crocodiles, thought to be the biggest clutch hatched in captivity, have made their public debut. The crocodiles, which measured 10cm when they were born within an hour of each other, went on show at Bristol Zoo aged ten weeks. They feed on crickets, fish and mice.

Shout verdict

A teacher who shouted at his wife so loudly that she suffered permanent hearing damage was convicted at Exeter Crown Court of causing actual bodily harm. Peter Pryor, 58, from Barnstaple, Devon, had wanted her to know how his timidity affected him. Sentencing was adjourned for reports.

School inquest

A pupil who died when he crashed his car into the gates of Malvern College during a police chase was over the legal drink-drive limit, an inquest was told. Julian Elwell, 17, had a reading of 104mg alcohol in 100ml of blood. The legal limit is 80mg. The hearing at Worcester was adjourned.

Lightbulb fault

The Co-op has issued an urgent recall of all its 40, 60 and 100-watt lightbulbs bought from the store since July. A small number of bulbs could be affected by a fault that might cause improperly earthed metal fittings to become live. The store is offering to refund or replace any suspect bulbs.

Theatre closes

The Arts Theatre, Cambridge, home of the student Footlights Review, is to close for four months next summer because of a cash crisis. It has debts of £1.5 million, only 11 months after it reopened following refurbishment paid for with a £6 million National Lottery grant.

Rotten luck

The first principles in 150 years to be ripped by rotting horse manure were picked yesterday. Experts at the Lost Gardens of Heligan had to rediscover the lost art of building a manure "hot bed". Richard Dee, head gardener, said: "It is a bit sharper than a supermarket one."

Willetts rejoins Thatcher era policy centre

By NICHOLAS WOOD

DAVID Willetts, one of the Conservatives' foremost political thinkers, is to rejoin the think-tank that helped to revive Tory fortunes in the 1970s. The Havant MP, who was forced to resign as a minister last year in the aftermath of the cash-for-questions scandal, is going back to the Centre for Policy Studies.

He will become deputy chairman of the centre, which was set up by Margaret Thatcher and Sir Keith Joseph in 1974 and blazed a trail for the radical free-market economics of the 1980s.

The comeback of Mr Willetts, 41, will intensify the rivalry among think-tanks. Although the left-leaning Demos and the Institute for Public Policy Research are close to Tony Blair, the centre and its right-wing rivals, such as the Adam Smith Institute, can still compete in the battle for the ear of opinion-formers.

Mr Willetts said his task was to give the centre strategic direction and put it back at the forefront of Con-

servative thought. "Thatcher and Joseph were the giants. Circumstances are different. In the 1970s, Conservative principles had been lost sight of. I don't think that's the problem now."

"But one of the things wrong in government was a failure to talk about Conservatism in an attractive and confident way. One way we should be able to help is by correcting some of the absurd caricatures of what Conservatives believe and contributing to a lively and attractive debate about the future of Conservatism."

Mr Willetts, a Tory spokesman on employment, will continue to deputise for Peter Lilley, who is spearheading William Hague's long-term review of Conservative policy.

At the think tank, which has lost some of its lustre in recent years, Tessa Kewick will remain as director and Lord Griffiths of Forestorchard as chairman. But Mr Willetts, director of the centre from 1987 to 1992, is expected to become its main driving force.

Guidelines will ensure fetuses feel no pain

By IAN MURRAY, MEDICAL CORRESPONDENT

FOETUSES older than 24 weeks should be sedated or anaesthetised during operations to save them or abort them, according to new guidelines drawn up to ensure they experience no pain.

A working party composed of medical experts, as well as a theologian and a lawyer, came to the conclusion that a fetus cannot feel pain until it is 26 weeks old. This is when the nerve connections are established between the cortex and the thalamus in the brain, the two parts that confer awareness. Erring on the safe side, the working party recommended that at 24 weeks a

doctor should consider taking the necessary precautions.

In practice, a doctor carrying out an abortion stops the heart of almost all fetuses older than 20 weeks. This is done by injection into the heart with a flexible needle.

Because abortions are not legal after the 24th week, they are only performed when the doctors decide there is a certainty the child would be born too handicapped to be viable. An extremely rare procedure, it was carried out in 62 of 160,000 abortions last year.

Dame Anne McLaren, who chaired the working party for the Royal College of Obstetri-

cians and Gynaecologists, said: "Sometimes a mother asks that the fetus is delivered live to her so that she can hold it. In those circumstances the doctor gives an analgesic to the mother which then gets through to the fetus before the abortion. The child only lives very briefly afterwards."

The British Medical Association welcomed the guidelines and said that even if there was no incontrovertible evidence that fetuses feel pain, the use of painkillers when carrying out procedures "may help to relieve the anxiety of the parents and health professionals".

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The Conservatives hit back, after a fashion

Labour women have been mocked as "mutton dressed as glam". Andrew Pierce reports

TORY women MPs struck back in the political fashion wars yesterday, by criticising the rapidly shortening hemlines, high heels and dress code of the new intake of sister Labour MPs. The Tory charge has been led by Ann Widdecombe, the formidable former Prisons Minister.

Just a week after the Conservatives were being mocked for their clothes sense at their "bonding weekend" in Eastbourne, Miss Widdecombe, a staunch traditionalist with a penchant for check jackets, said: "I have never believed that appearance matters too much. But the new Labour people are obsessed with it. They come to the House of Commons dolled up to the nines in inappropriate short skirts."

"Some of them wear so much make-up they look like over-zealous assistants at a department store cosmetics counter. They do not look like they are at Westminster for serious hard work at all. They are dressed more for the catwalk than the Palace of Westminster."

The number of Labour women MPs has risen to 101 — compared with the Tories 13 — after positive discrimination in the choice of election candidates. Miss Widdecombe was speaking in response to Tory party plans to introduce its own positive discrimination for the first time to encourage more Tory women MPs.

The proposals include compelling Conservative associations to ensure 25 per cent of the candidates called for interview are women, but she said: "I deprecate any form of positive discrimination. If women get to Parliament not by beating all the opposition, as her male colleagues have done, but by having a place reserved for them, there is a danger that they will be perceived as second-class citizens."

"Unfortunately, the behaviour of some of the Labour women has added credence to this. The new intake of women is frightful."

Last month, it emerged that a number of the new women had complained to the Whips about the brusque style of Betty Boothroyd, the Speaker, who is renowned for her immaculate but conservative dress sense. Miss Widdecombe was contemptuous. "Absolutely typical. Betty Boothroyd is tough but fair on everyone. These women cannot take it because they have not come through the horrors of the system like we have. They were given apron strings to hang on to because Labour's



Top, from left: Follett and Smith, who said: "Judge us on what we say; below, Brinton, and McIsaac, who said: 'We try to look professional'"



positive discrimination. The dear little souls are not up to it."

Miss Widdecombe shops in Mrs Mop in her Maldstone constituency and at the Army & Navy in London, and wears light unobtrusive make-up. She admits that her lipstick has faded by the middle of the afternoon and always forgets to replace it. When women were scarier at Westminster,

power-dressing was taken to its extreme with exaggerated shoulder pads, cardigans, pearls and towering, heavily lacquered Thatcher hairstyles. Baroness Thatcher immortalised the don't-show-your-knees skirt. But power suits are now being overtaken by psychedelic pink T-shirts and high-heeled shoes by some at the cutting edge of fashion. Tory MPs have

dubbed some of the older Labour women "mutton dressed as glam", and one Tory woman said: "The trouble is with some of the new girls they seem more interested in the labels and looking good on television than they do on the legislation. They spend ages in front of the mirror."

But the Labour women were unrepentant. Angela Smith, the new Labour MP for Basildon and East Thurrock, laughed out loud when told of Miss Widdecombe's comments, and said: "Ann Widdecombe has fallen into the classic trap of criticising women because of their appearance rather than on what they say. I don't know what the wrong skirt is or the wrong pair of shoes."

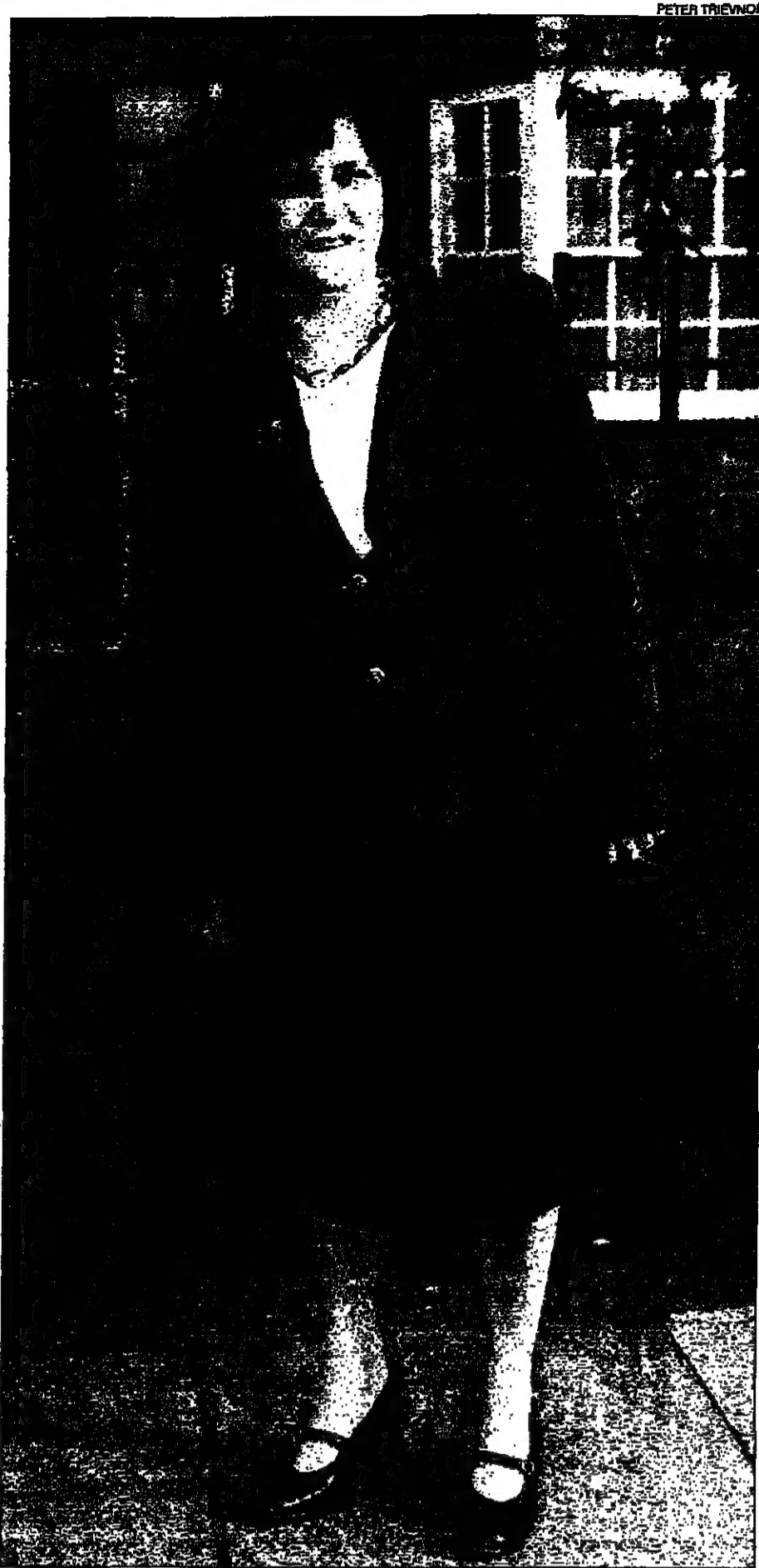
"She is a silly woman. I personally am not a mini-skirt person. But I am surprised that she of all people says these things. I feel sorry for her because she has had to endure some very hurtful things about her own appearance."

Helen Brinton, the MP for Peterborough who has found herself the regular butt of sexual gibes from Tory males, said: "We can mix it and match it just as well as Ann Widdecombe. We don't need lectures on our clothes sense from her, as if what we wear matters anyway. Ann Widdecombe is proof of the pudding. We are judged on our actions. I would not dream of commenting on her dress sense. I shouldn't think anyone would."

The most popular new Labour look was pioneered by Barbara Follett, now MP for Stevenage, who once colour-coded Labour frontbenchers such as Margaret Beckett, and wears matching two-piece suits in brights reds, greens and yellows, with accessories to match. Many favour comfortable trouser suits.

Shona McIsaac, 37, the MP for Cleethorpes, summed up the new image on her first day in the Commons, with a camel trouser-suit, leopard skin polo-neck, and dark brown brogues with fake snakeskin accessories. She said: "Some of the younger women, because of their age, naturally wear clothes which are perceived to be more fashionable. But all of us try to look professional."

Miss Widdecombe, who has been dubbed Doris Karloff by her political enemies, said that she took comments about her appearance in her stride: "I can take it. They can't. That is the difference. Westminster is a serious place, not a fashion show."



Ann Widdecombe: "I have never believed that appearance matters too much"

Critics look back in anger on Oasis brothers' latest outburst

By DAMIAN WHITWORTH

IF they had been seeking to provoke a reaction they succeeded. Noel and Liam Gallagher served up some old-fashioned rock star loudness and there were calls for heads to roll yesterday.

The BBC offered apologies and promised investigations. Downing Street made a statement, MPs howled with outrage and one of the brothers chased after reporters while Tony Blackburn offered to fight them in the street.

Trouble started, as often seems to be the way, when Liam Gallagher opened his mouth. He was live on air and the words that issued forth, on the subject of George Harrison and Mick Jagger, were unfit for 8pm. He became so heated during the interview on Radio 1's Evening Session on Thursday that he stormed out of the studio. His brother Noel added to the controversy by advocating the legalisation of cannabis.

The BBC apologised and said that it had launched an



Liam, left, and Noel Gallagher: turned airwaves blue

investigation. Andy Parfitt, Radio 1's deputy controller, was meeting Steve Lamacq, the presenter of the show, and his producer about what happened.

A spokesman for Radio 1 said that only Noel had been expected for the interview, but he had turned up with Liam in tow. "Steve Lamacq and his producer made every effort behind the scenes to stop them from swearing. I think he did everything he could to try to calm things down, and even-

tually Liam decided to leave the studio."

Roger Gale, chairman of the Conservative backbench Media Committee, and a former Radio 1 producer, said the corporation had acted irresponsibly. "When a person has a reputation for behaving in an immature fashion, you don't bother to give them airtime. It's not the BBC's or radio's job to give public airtime to foul-mouthed self-publicists."

Brian Iddon, Labour MP for

Bolton South East, the constituency in which five-year-old Dillon Hull was shot dead in a drug feud, told the BBC's *World at One* that he wished Noel Gallagher had not been invited to Downing Street by Tony Blair.

Downing Street issued a statement to the programme: "The Government is not in the business of legitimising drugs. There is no association with Noel Gallagher's remarks."

Journalists who approached Liam yesterday did so at their peril. The Press Association reported an encounter between reporters and the singer outside his house. Met with a string of obscenities and informed where he planned to put their cameras, they were chased down the street.

Tony Blackburn, the disc jockey, said: "Let's face it they are a cheap copy band of the Beatles and so juvenile. And all this business about 'offering people out' — well, I'm outside the Capital Radio studios just after 10am every weekday if they want to show how tough they are."

Quiet passing for reading room

Robin Young sees the end of an era for the British Museum's haven

THE 140-year history of the Round Reading Room at the British Museum is ending not with a bang, nor even a whisper. As he sits in a space devoted to the pursuit of silent study, the room is reaching the end of an era almost soundlessly.

The reading room closes today, but few readers are expected to be there for the final hours. Even yesterday, fewer than a third of the 375 readers' seats were occupied.

Things were very different when the room first opened to the public in 1857. Then, Antonio Panizzi, its creator and the British Museum's keeper of printed books, recorded that more than 162,000 visitors came to see it in the first week.

Now, the British Library

staff, despite its preoccupation with removing 12 million books and serials from collections to the new premises at St Pancras, is quietly admitting small parties for a parting glimpse of the room.

In the new dispensation at the British Museum the room is destined to become an information centre housing the museum's own Paul Hamlyn Library of 25,000 volumes. In its new role the area will be open for the use of all the museum's visitors.

"There is a great deal of sadness," said Michael Crump, the British Library's director of reader services and collections development. "But we have given our readers good notice. As far as the move goes, we are doing brilliantly. We are even two



weeks ahead of schedule." That is small compensation for those few who find that the reading room is now closed and that its St Pancras replacement does not open

until November 24. Raoul Jimenez, from Caracas, said: "I have come all the way from Venezuela. I wanted to research the British role in Venezuelan history. For me it is a disaster."

The move is also regarded with some concern by the coffee bars, restaurants and bookshops surrounding the British Museum. "We had the most learned dining tables in London," said a manager at the Coptic Street branch of Pizza Express. "Our singles tables were regularly occupied by great scholars from all over the world and now we will not be seeing them again."

Famous reading room users of the past include Karl Marx, Gandhi, Lenin, Thomas Hardy, Rudyard Kipling, and George Bernard Shaw.

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New Library,
Magazine, page 42

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Teen mag enables girls to fight on

By DAMIAN WHITWORTH

THE first authorised boxing match between two girls has been sponsored by a magazine for teenage girls.

Bliss will pay a Carmarthenshire boxing club £300 towards the event next week.

Kerry Farnell, the Editor, said: "If there's a meaning to girl power, this is it. It is not just a nonsense publicity stunt by girls wearing hardly any clothes."

Marie Leefe and Marie Davies from St Clears, Carmarthenshire, are billed to fight two girls from Cornwall and Cardigan, but if either opponent drops out they are determined to fight each other.

Earlier this month two 13-year-olds were due to fight but one pulled out at the last minute because of controversy.

Venables lied in court, judge says

By A STAFF REPORTER

A JUDGE yesterday accused Terry Venables of lying on oath as he jailed the former England football coach's closest friend and right-hand man, Eddie Ashby, for managing Tottenham Hotspur and Mr Venables' drinking club in the West End of London while an undischarged bankrupt.

Judge Timothy Pontius said that at best Mr Venables' evidence was "fanciful", but he believed the former England boss had intended "deliberately and dishonestly" to mislead the jury at Knightsbridge Crown Court.

Last night Mr Venables said he was appalled at the judge's remarks. "For the judge to condemn me in the way he has leaves me feeling very bitter towards a system which appears to have convicted me in a case in which I was not on trial. I cannot establish what, in my evidence, the judge took to be dishonest and do not believe he can have considered the effect his unfounded comments will have on me."

Mr Venables had stood in

the witness box for two days, detailing his relationship with Ashby, 53, who in recent months had followed him to Portsmouth FC, which Venables bought for £1. He said: "Eddie has never let me down and that is why he is with me today."

Ashby was declared bankrupt in June 1991 and described his job at the North London club as no more than "a glorified secretary". In fact he was paid up to £96,000, which he did not declare to his creditors. Neither did he declare the money he received from working at Scribes West night club.

Mr Venables said that he did not know that Ashby was a bankrupt when he asked him to work at Spurs and at his Kensington club. He said it was "absolute nonsense" and "very annoying" to suggest Ashby had any management role while Venables was the chief executive at White Hart Lane. "He did not make decisions, he did what I told him."

Ashby already had 43 failed



Ashby: sent to jail for four months

companies behind him when he began chairing management meetings at Spurs and signing letters as "general manager". The court was told that he hired and fired staff and authorised salary rises.

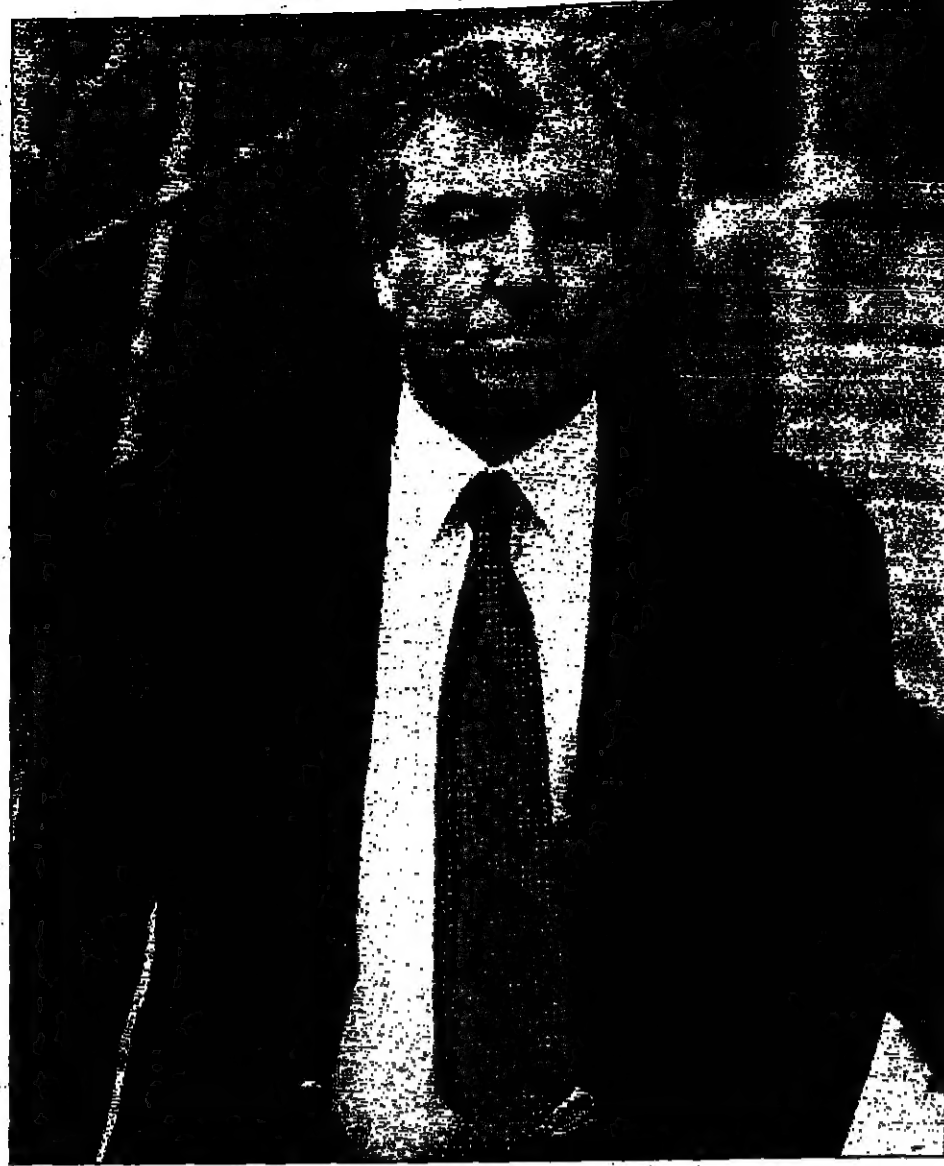
Ashby grumbled yesterday as the judge jailed him for four months, saying: "I take the view that little more than a salutary clanging of the prison doors is necessary." Judge Pontius said that he had

reduced the original sentence he had had in mind "as an act of mercy, to enable you to be released to your family in time for Christmas".

Ashby was disqualified from being a company director for seven years. This will run alongside the nine-year ban imposed 13 months ago by the High Court.

The judge told him: "It is a regrettable and sad aspect of this case that you, a person of impeccable character hitherto, chose blatantly to give perjured evidence before the jury and, more seriously, to call as a witness on your behalf your boss, Terry Venables, to give evidence which the jury plainly found to be at best fanciful and at worst intended by you both to deliberately and dishonestly mislead them as to the true position. I have not the slightest hesitation myself in preferring the second view."

Court officials said last night that no action was contemplated against Mr Venables. The judge's clerk said if he had planned such a move, he would have announced it in open court. Ashby is to appeal.



Terry Venables outside the court. He said he was appalled at the judge's remarks

Terrorism expert is blown up by war souvenir

By TIM JONES

AN EXPERT on warfare and counter-terrorism has been killed by a battlefield souvenir that exploded at his home.

John Pimlott, 49, the head of War Studies at the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst, was discovered by his wife yesterday morning lying dead in the sitting room of their bungalow in Camberley, Surrey.

Described as a brilliant and inspiring man, he was the author of what were considered to be definitive books on warfare. He was recently featured in the Channel 4 series *Decisive Battles*.

Last night an army spokesman said: "This seems to have been a tragic accident. The device that exploded may not have been as big as a grenade. It may have been a rusted and seemingly innocuous piece of ordnance such as an old and apparently harmless detonator."

"Dr Pimlott made numerous tours of old battlefields and he may have picked up this item to remind him of a trip to El Alamein or some other famous site."

After his wife raised the alarm, police and army bomb disposal experts went to the home and houses in the area were evacuated as police searched for more explosives.

One neighbour, Les Brown, had heard a small explosion before midnight but had thought it was a firework going off. He said: "I didn't check it out because you expect to hear such bangs at this time of year."

Damage to the bungalow was minor, with only a small window blown out.

Police officers who examined the home discovered a

huge array of military memorabilia but none of it was found to be dangerous.

Dr Pimlott, a father of two, was a civilian lecturer at Sandhurst for 24 years. He was made head of his department in 1994. Last night, Matthew Midlane, the director of studies at Sandhurst, described Dr Pimlott as a "brilliant and inspiring man". His books included *The Gulf War Assessed*, *Decisive Battles of the Vietnam War* and *The Guinness History of the British Army*. His specialist areas were counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism.

Mr Midlane said: "He was extremely well-known for his prolific output with popular writings on almost any aspect of 20th-century warfare. He brought serious military history to a much wider audience."

He added: "Despite his distinguished record in research and writing, he always considered himself primarily a teacher."



Pimlott brought military studies to wider public

Two appear in court over car crash deaths

TWO men appeared in court yesterday charged in connection with the deaths of a young couple in a car crash.

Jason Humble and Keith Collier, both of Faraborough, Hampshire, were remanded in custody by magistrates in Farnham, West London. Mr Humble, 32, was charged with manslaughter after Toby Exley and Karen Martin died on October 6. The couple's car

crossed the central reservation of the A316 and smashed into an oncoming car.

Mr Collier, 49, was charged with assisting an offender by falsely reporting to police the theft of a vehicle knowing it had been involved in a fatal accident, with intent to impede the apprehension or prosecution of a person who had committed the arrestable offence of manslaughter.

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Amendments of the Limitation Rule

Umbria, home of the arts, pleads for aid

Richard Owen reports from Spoleto that damage done by recent earthquakes is far worse than first thought

With shock and concern still reverberating a month after the earthquake that severely damaged the Basilica of St Francis at Assisi, it is emerging that far more art treasures in Umbria are at serious risk than was previously thought.

They include the great cathedral at Spoleto, famed for its summer arts festival, and world-renowned Renaissance frescoes at Montefalco.

"Umbria, home of the arts, is weeping and deeply wounded," *La Repubblica* said. "It is not just Assisi which has been shaken by the tremors. We need to raise the alarm." The Archbishop of Spoleto, Mgr Riccardo Fontana, said recent inspections showed that the 11th-century Duomo, or cathedral, had suffered very serious damage in the continuing tremors.

Archbishop Fontana is aggrieved that destruction in the Spoleto area has been overshadowed. "The Bishop of Assisi naturally has had a lot to say about the damage there," he said. "But nobody can say that this part of Umbria is worse off than that part, or deserves more help. Four villages in my diocese, including Sellano, the epicentre of the recent earthquakes, have been destroyed. The earthquakes shake the whole mountain."

The epicentre of the earthquakes, initially near Foligno, has moved gradually south, with tremors felt in Rome and even Naples. There were further strong tremors at Sellano on Thursday and yesterday. The Archbishop's Palace in Spoleto has been declared uninhabitable, and Mgr Fontana, who for the first few nights of the crisis slept in his car, like thousands of other residents, has taken refuge in a nearby monastery.

Perched high on a hill, Spoleto was once the centre of a powerful duchy, until it was sacked by Barbarossa in 1155. It revived in the 16th century when Lucrezia Borgia was made governor at the age of 19 by her father, Pope Alexander VI. Its modern fame rests on the Festival of Two Worlds, the music, dance and theatre festival founded by Giancarlo Menotti in 1958, which attracts world-class performers and well-heeled audiences to match. Gala concerts are held in the cathedral.



The exterior of Spoleto's 11th-century cathedral. The archbishop says £1 million is needed to shore it up

holding up the cathedral cupola have sagged and a third is badly cracked. Art experts and engineers say the fall of the cupola would destroy priceless frescoes by the Florentine artist Fra Filippo Lippi (1406-69), above all the masterpiece of his final years, his *Coronation of the Virgin* (1469), which is painted in the apse semidome.

The cathedral also contains the painter's tomb: a friar, he was accused of seducing a girl from a noted local family and is said to have been murdered by her relations. He did his last work at Spoleto, including a series of frescoes in the choir which are also now thought to be at risk: *The Annunciation*, *The Birth of Christ* and *The Death of Mary*.

The cathedral's medieval buttresses are fractured and the facade, with a giant mosaic depicting Christ Pantocrator, dated 1207, has come away from the fabric of the building. There are fissures in the 15th-century Erolti chapel (named after the bishop of the time, Costantino Erolti), which contain frescoes by Pinturicchio (1455-1513), including a Madonna and Child with Lake Trasimeno — one of the best-loved spots in Umbria — shown clearly in the background.

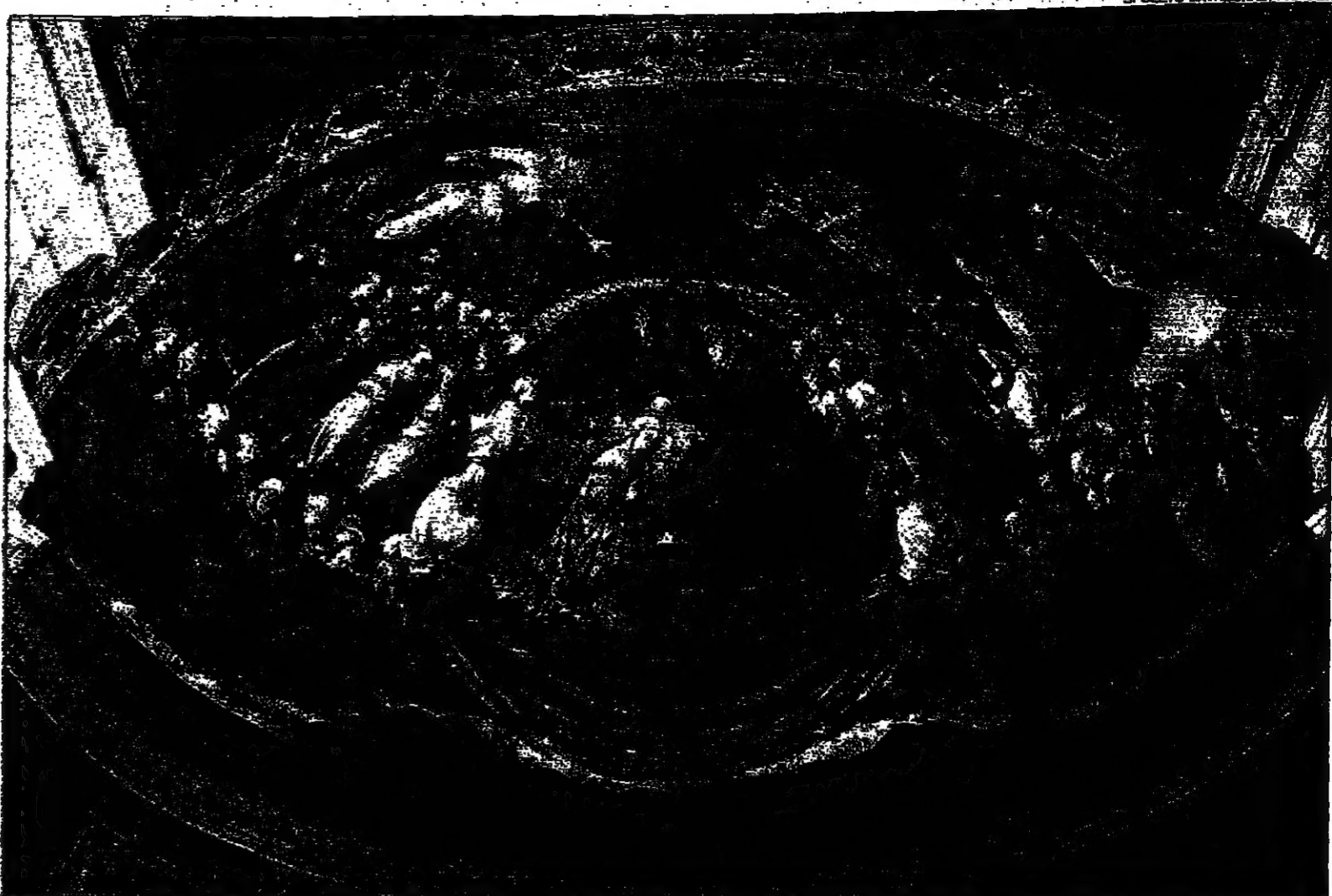
"Something must be done immediately," the archbishop said. "The walls, pilasters and buttresses are tilting, the stability of the entire building is threatened." He said Spoleto needed £1 million "to shore it up and avoid the worst. It is a race against time: we are worried about new tremors." Nearly 800 churches in the



Spoleto diocese "of artistic and historic importance" have been closed for inspection. There is also concern for the spectacular medieval aqueduct across the gorge beyond the cathedral, the Ponte delle Torri, which is 260 yards long and supported by ten 260ft-high arches.

Twelve miles north, nearer to the epicentre of the first earthquakes at Foligno, emergency measures have been taken to save the 15th-century frescoes at Montefalco by Benozzo Gozzoli (1420-97), which were restored only seven years ago. The works depict scenes from the life of St Francis, inspired by Giotto's frescoes at Assisi, with recognisable Umbrian and Tuscan landscapes in the background. Montefalco is famed for its views — it is dubbed "The Balcony of Umbria" — and its Sangrantino wine is one of the most prized in Italy.

But its glory is the former Church of San Francesco, now the town museum. In addition to works by Gozzoli, who, like Lippi was a Florentine genius, the former church boasts an



In imminent danger: Fra Filippo Lippi's *Coronation of the Virgin* (1469), which is painted in the apse semidome of Spoleto Cathedral



Details from the *Coronation*, Filippo Lippi's masterpiece of his last years: left, two angels dancing and, right, the Virgin with God the Father



Annunciation and Nativity by Perugino, and frescoes from the school of Giotto.

The campaign to preserve Montefalco's treasures is being led by Luigi Gambacurta, the Mayor, who teaches literature at the local secondary school and speaks of Gozzoli as if he were still alive. Signor Gambacurta is praised as a local hero for his swift

action in shoring up the frescoes when the first earthquake struck.

"The first shock was in the middle of the night," he recalled. "At first light I went to the school to check it was all right. Then I rushed to San Francesco and was horrified to see the amount of plaster that had fallen in the apse." He asked art restorers from Spole-

to to erect scaffolding to support the nave, with the help of local carpenters. "We got it in place just before the second earthquake struck at 11.42, the same one that brought down the ceiling at Assisi. Here the scaffolding swayed, but it held."

The museum is planning to take visitors up onto the scaffolding to see how restoration

work on Gozzoli's masterpieces is proceeding.

However, there is still protective gauze over the frescoes and there are fears for the roof, in particular for the vault above the apse, whose ribs were reinforced with iron bars after an earthquake earlier in the century.

"Many jewels of art in Umbria are at risk, but the

city is that not many Italians are aware of them," Paola Manuelli, a guide at San Francesco, said. "We get 20,000 visitors a year at the museum, but many of them are foreigners on the Umbrian art trail." Signor Menotti said that he hoped to organise a concert at Spoleto with top-class performers to raise funds for restoration.

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Threatened dormouse sent packing

NEWS IN BRIEF

Cab driver accused of raping girl, 13

A taxi driver accused of the triple rape of a 13-year-old girl in his black cab was remanded in custody for a week by Bow Street magistrates in London yesterday. Peter Goddard, 40, of Benfleet, Essex, also faces three charges of unlawful sexual intercourse with a minor and one of indecent assault. Between March 23 and 24, the girl had been visiting London from her home in Southampton to meet Brian Harvey, the former member of the pop group East 17.

Boys rewarded

Three boys aged seven to nine were given good citizen's awards and £50 each for handing in £300 dropped by two armed robbers whom they followed from a Middlesbrough post office after a hold-up.

Youngest pervert

A boy aged 14 became the youngest on the paedophile register after admitting assaults on two eight-year-old boys. Yeovil magistrates made a supervision order and bound over his parents to ensure his good behaviour.

US sale allowed

The Government has given the go-ahead for Henry Dent Brocklehurst, of Sudeley Castle, Gloucestershire, to sell *Temps Calme* by Poussin to the Getty Museum in California for £15 million. No British buyer had been found.

Murder charge

Graham Sate, 24, has been remanded in custody by magistrates at Great Yarmouth, Norfolk, charged with murdering five-year-old Lauren Creed. Her mother, Sharon, was remanded on bail on a cruelty charge.

Design flaw

Elements Ribcra was mistakenly called its New Generation Designer at the British Fashion Awards because the wrong name was put in the envelope for the ceremony at the Albert Hall. Antonio Berardi was the winner.

Tunnel rail link is a moving experience for wildlife, reports Simon de Bruxelles

BEATRIX POTTER would have been dismayed to learn that since the start of the summer, in conditions of the utmost secrecy, some of our shyest and most attractive residents have been rounded up and put in cages.

She would have been relieved, however, to discover that they are being moved because they live on the route of the new high-speed rail link to the Channel Tunnel.

Top of the wanted list is a creature most people will never see but everyone loves — the common dormouse. The line from London will cut a swath through some of the best "dormouse woods" in Britain. Nearly 100 of the creatures have been caught and dispatched to a dormouse dormitory in the West Country.

Kent's loss is the rest of the country's gain. Once the mice have slept through the winter, they will be released in woods in three English counties where dormice were common 100 years ago but have since disappeared.

Douglas Woods, 76, a naturalist who has devoted the past 18 years to studying and breeding the creatures, is in charge of the operation. Until he discovered in the early 1980s that the best way to find a dormouse was to provide a house for it, little was known about its habits.

Although the dormouse's tight, round nest is occasionally found in undergrowth by woodmen, dormice are rarely seen and leave few clues to their existence. Mr Woods, from Cheddar, Somerset, said: "Dormice are nocturnal and spend virtually all their time in the trees. They might range from the topmost branches of the highest oak down to bracken, but they never set foot on the ground unless it is by accident or to hibernate."

You could visit a dormouse wood every day and never see one. Until recently it was believed that they hibernated in the roots of trees. Now we



This heavyweight dormouse preparing for winter in Somerset weighed 47g, which is thought to be a record



A dormouse nesting box at a secret location is checked

breeding herd, it is now known that a dormouse preparing for winter can double its weight in days. The feeding frenzy is triggered as the days grow shorter and the nights colder.

Mr Woods said: "The curtain comes down with the first hard frost. Then their food

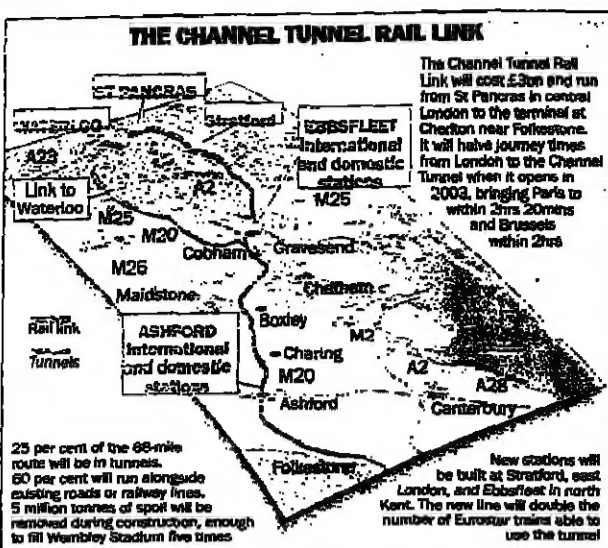
disappears, all the insects die and the blackberries and other autumn fruits are just a husk. Any animal that hasn't put on enough weight by then to see it through the winter months will starve."

The solitary creatures live no more than a handful to the acre and time to catch them

know that they actually move away from trees into hollows under moss or ivy which provides insulation when the temperature falls.

Other protected creatures, including badgers, great crested newts, slow-worms and common lizards are also being found new homes. Four artificial sets have been built for the badgers and they are expected to move in of their own accord. The newts have proved elusive. Of about ten breeding sites identified during an environmental study of the route in 1993, more than half have vanished. Low rainfall is blamed.

The dormouse round-up has produced one record breaker. The average adult dormouse weighs 15g to 40g and is 14cm to 18cm long, but Mr Woods now has a 47g heavyweight. Thanks to miniature transmitters and observation of Mr Woods's



PROTECTED SPECIES BEING MOVED



Dormouse (Muscardinus arborarius). Britain's only golden coloured rodent. Nocturnal and arboreal, lives around five years. Two litters a year of two to nine naked, blind babies. Forms a tightly woven spherical nest 1-2m above the ground. Hibernates underground from late October to April.



Badger (Meles meles). Familiar black and white striped brock once persecuted by farmers and baited for sport. The principal ingredient in badger-hair shaving brushes. Omnivorous and nocturnal, its favourite food is earthworms. Badger setts can have up to 40 entrances and be inhabited for generations. Boar can weigh up to 500lb.



Slow worm (Anguilla fragilis). Neither a worm nor a snake but a lizard with no legs. Average 12 inches long and found in leaf litter on woodland fringes, quarries, churchyards and railway embankments. Long tail breaks off if caught hold of by small boys or other predators. Harmless but has suffered for resemblance to snakes.



Great crested newt (Triturus cristatus). Amphibian often speckled with brightly coloured spots. Once feared by country folk who believed it to be related to a dragon and capable of breathing fire. Grows up to six inches long and male sports serrated crest during courtship. In decline owing to drainage of ponds and marshes.



Viviparous lizard (Lacerta vivipara). Common lizard enjoys basking on dry sunny banks and eating insects. Very hard to catch owing to dramatic turn of speed and ability to shed tail, which carries on wriggling long after its owner has vanished. Up to six inches long.

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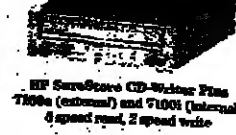
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Enter, aged 50, the motherly, mellow Hillary

BY the time the helicopter carrying Hillary Clinton lifts off the South Lawn at the White House next week for her low-key visit to Ireland and London, her makeover as America's caring First Lady will be all but complete.

Tomorrow she celebrates her 50th birthday with an unofficial White House party before a two-day, very public trip to Chicago complete with gala and fireworks.

She will even appear as a guest on the *Oprah Winfrey Show* before returning to Washington for the transatlantic, semi-ambassadorial sortie to Dublin, Belfast and London. Only months ago this was a woman who took private walks around the American capital, consulted the depths of her Christian faith, and channelled via guru to Eleanor Roosevelt and Mahatma Gandhi.

The healthcare programme she had championed and whose failure was partly to blame for the overwhelming defeat of Democrats in the mid-term elections of 1994 was still viewed as an irredeemable Achilles' heel preventing her return to policymaking.

Her personal standing, at once provoking fierce loyalty among women and intense hatred among many men, had forced Mrs Clinton to retreat into seclusion throughout the period of her husband's re-election last year. There was regular talk that she would be indicted.

But now, Sister, Frigidaire,

Mrs Clinton has thrown off her dauntingly chilly, image, reports Tom Rhodes

as she was known throughout the Administration's first term, has returned as Mellow Mother, a leading figure who no longer trades insults with members of Congress but prefers to make her point by ruffling the hair of a toddler in a day-care centre.

This week she embraced child care, drawing attention to the "silent crisis" which affects every American parent. It was she who had worked closely behind the scenes to develop her husband's new policy, one which, as with so much of his Administration, has concentrated on minor initiatives with little investment. But it has, nevertheless, given Mrs Clinton the opportunity to flex her considerable brain once again.

Even her wardrobe has been transformed from the arch, power-dressing reds and greens of the past to the pastel shades of Oscar de la Renta. The many hairstyles, which two years ago she claimed resulted from her boredom, have now settled into a neat and carefully blow-dried cut. Two years and many bombs

after her husband's triumphant visit to Ireland, Mrs Clinton will test the waters of peace when she delivers the first Joyce McCartan Memorial lecture in Belfast, a series devoted to both unity and leadership among Protestant and Catholic women. She will also travel to Chequers for an evening with the Blairs.

Like her husband, Mrs Clinton will be far from retiring age when the couple finally leave the White House and, while she has told friends that she and Bill Clinton might become itinerant college professors based in Arkansas (she hates the cold of Chicago), few believe such a task would be completely satisfying. But for the moment, Hillary Clinton is happy to be back in a less glaring limelight.


Leading article, page 23



The White House Conference on Child Care

Back in the spotlight: Hillary Clinton, accompanying her husband at this week's conference on child care at the White House where the President pledged to make such services more affordable. She has worked hard behind the scenes to develop the President's new policy






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Why a Scots lady can no longer bank on privacy

Britain's only branch for women is to close, reports Shirley English

THERE were always certain subjects that a lady did not like to discuss in mixed company. Her financial situation, for example. But times change, and it seems that men are everywhere these days. Even Britain's only all-women bank is having to close at the end of next week.

The Ladies Branch of the Royal Bank of Scotland was established in 1964 to cater for Edinburgh wives who preferred not to conduct their finances with members of the opposite sex. It still has 1,500 customers. They have been invited to move in its passing during its final five days, with wine and nibbles in the branch's coffee lounge overlooking Princes Street.

According to the bank's chiefs, the branch is no longer viable and has confined its use. The number of callers has fallen to an average of 50 a day; women are no longer intimidated by bank managers or dependent on husbands.

When the Ladies Branch opened it was regarded as revolutionary. David Alexander, general manager, picked up the idea from New Zealand. The all-female staff — headed by Scotland's first woman bank manager, Margaret Reid — added to the appeal for well-to-do Edinburgh wives and widows unused to the vulgarity of dealing with money.

Banished were banking's age-old decorative formulae of one part mahogany, three

parts marble and six parts cream paintwork. In its place were plush green carpets, gold hand-printed floral wallpaper and velvet curtains, set off with flowers and soft music.

Best of all, the branch at 144 Princes Street was conveniently sited next door to Bimms (now House of Fraser). Ladies could not only replenish their purse with up to £10 on demand, but could also refresh their make-up in the blue powder room.

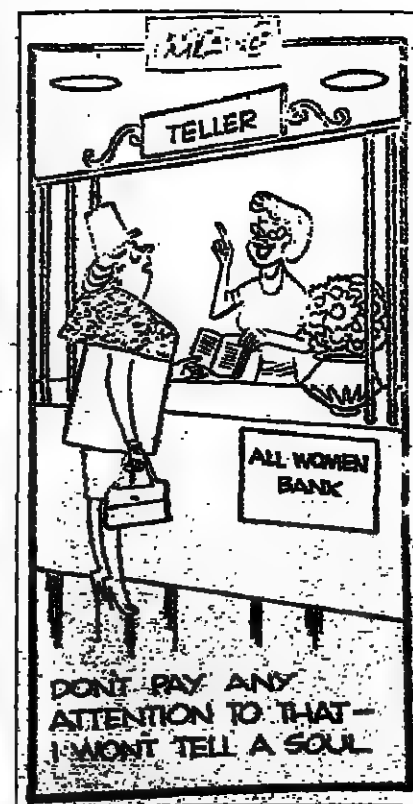
If they chose, they could then join in the gentle murmur of gossip over a free cup of coffee or tea served in china cups on a silver tray by a waitress. Women's magazines and a free telephone with leather-bound directory were all an essential part of the service.

The branch has since moved from the ground floor to the second, and the china has long since gone, replaced by plastic cups and a coffee machine, despite genteel protests. Seventy per cent of clients are retired. The decor is now standard corporate style and the branch even has a small number of male customers who infiltrated via joint accounts. But the magazines and the personal welcome are still there.

Although a lot quieter than its heyday in the 1970s when it had 3,000 accounts, the leisurely atmosphere has hardly changed. Yesterday ladies arriving to transact business paused to chat with staff. For



Free tea or coffee in china cups, and free phone calls made amid hand-printed wallpaper and velvet drapes were all part of the service. Right, how the bank was advertised



the few younger women dashing in during their lunch break, the lack of queues was a welcome alternative to the busy flow of custom in the main bank two floors below, to which the ladies accounts will be transferred.

Jessie Alexander, widow of the general manager who

pioneered the branch, was the first to open an account there. Yesterday, discreetly giving her age as "over 21", she said: "It's sad it's closing and I will miss it, but times move on. When it opened, women perhaps hesitated to go into a bank and rather liked the idea of a lady manager they could

talk to, but now they go into banks all the time, don't they?" Although some ladies guiltily admitted to doing most of their banking by phone or machine these days, others were less than happy with the change. Sheila Wylie, 69, a former minister's wife, said: "I would rather remain upstairs

than downstairs. It is going to be so busy with all those awful queues." Elizabeth Fraser, the third customer to join in 1964, said: "It is a great shame. I know all the girls (tellers) and I meet friends here. All the other branches are the same as each other. I don't think its true that women no longer

want this sort of service." Betty Johnson, 53, the longest serving staff member, has been overseeing the final days and will take on the role of "meeter-greeter" downstairs to welcome the ladies to their new branch. She said: "Everyone is very sad. They value the personal touch. Sometimes we

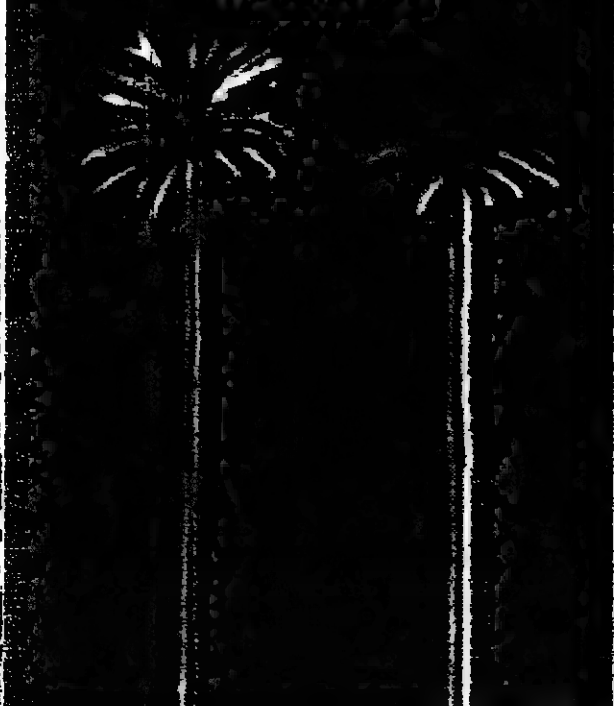
are the only person they speak to in a day." But Vicki Wilkinson, the Royal Bank archivist, said: "The Ladies Branch was ahead of its time. It led the way with new standards of service. Now everyone else has caught up and it is no longer different."

This Christmas American Express would like to give you a first class present.



Sheila Wylie seeks advice on the changes. She said: "It is going to be so busy with all those awful queues"

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Fresh fields are ripe for Amis to harvest

IT was at dinner the other night that I realised that even some New Yorkers talk about Martin Amis all the time.

I was dining at Theodore, a natty new restaurant on the fringes of the Chelsea district, and, hard as I tried, I could not get Mr Amis off the conversational menu.

Do not misunderstand. Nobody at the table actually liked his oeuvre, with one lady — a stylish teacher of English at the Brearley School, New York's equivalent of Roedean — even using the word "rubbish" to describe the last Amis book she had read.

"Do you teach him to your girls?" I asked, mischievously. "Certainly not," she replied, stiffening momentarily. "I teach literature. Mr Amis may have *The Information* but he does not have the knowledge."

All present, however, were intrigued by one thing. Mr Amis had declared recently that he might soon abandon London and come to live in New York. All at the table

TUNKU VARADARAJAN'S NEW YORK



wondered why. Was their city a better place for a novelist than London? After all, as the English teacher pointed out, history shows that London is more fecund by far when it comes to producing literature.

We talked about this. Today's London, it was agreed, had Julian Barnes. Peter

Ackroyd, Amis himself and Salman Rushdie (who, although now of no fixed address, was deemed to be a "London writer"). Who is the New York novelist today? Only Norman Mailer, and he is not now young.

"But New York has much better dentists than London,"

said my friend, Ellen Wagner, who works with the *Muppet Show*. Clearly, the Great Teeth Debate is not now confined to "skanky" London — as Mr Amis recently described it — but has reached the Big Apple too.

The dinner-table jury was, in the end, split on "New York versus London". One person said: "Listen, Amis's 'thing' is the triumph of style over content, so this city would be perfect for him. Look around you. New York is like Amis... self-referential, overblown, aggravating, clever."

"You mean, of course, that Amis is like New York," I pointed out gently, trying to put matters in the right perspective. "True, true," she agreed, somewhat chastened. But thankfully, she carried on: "Whatever one thinks of his work, and it is uneven, Amis is a writer of great energy. It's a very New York kind of energy."

Who knows, he may even write a *New York Fields* here one day. Personally, I hope he will.

Liz Taylor to rescue

FRANK PERINO, a blind man from Long Island, is making substantial progress in his crusade to get Britain to change its rules about putting visiting guide-dogs in quarantine. He rang me last month, saying that he had had to cancel "a holiday of a

lifetime" to London because he would not be able to enter the country with Timber, his "eye". I wrote about his plight in this column, and now Elizabeth Taylor, no less, has given him her support, writing that the rules are an affront to a civilised society.



Martin Amis and partner Isabel Fonseca are considering a move from London to New York

Checking up on Chekhov

New Yorkers have had occasion for a philosophical meditation on the meaning of the word "lost". Harper's magazine features on its cover the claim that it is publishing "Nine Lost Stories" by Anton Chekhov, the Russian writer. Being something of a Chekhovist, I grabbed the magazine and read the superb stories.

But were they "lost"? The translator, Peter Constantine, had encountered them in the New York Public Library, tucked away in obscure Russian journals from the last century. He promptly translated them, thereby "discovering" them. Am I the only one to detect a touch of "Christopher Columbus and America" in this story?

As a rule, one does not entertain at home in New York. This is because dining rooms are small, kitchens smaller and good restaurants abundant. But there is another reason: one can never be sure about just who is coming to dinner.

Last week I arranged a supper, and invited Barclay



Chekhov: masterpieces in obscure journals

Palmer, who runs CNN's New York bureau. He brought his fiancée, Dana Cowin, the elegant editor-in-chief of *Food & Wine* magazine, the foodies' bible. If only I'd known, dinner might have been more edible.

A good name for dropping

JUST as John Ruskin avoided walking past Keble College at Oxford, regarding it as too ugly, I try not to stroll past the UN headquarters here. The other day, I had no choice. But my gloom was lifted when I saw a street-sign there, now out-of-date. It said: "Nelson and Winnie Mandela Corner". Has any one told Grapa Machel?

Hopes soar for first supersonic pumpkin flight

FROM TOM RHODES IN WASHINGTON

NOW that Britain's Thrust SSC supersonic car has entered the record books as the fastest vehicle on land, there appears to be open season on breaking the sound barrier: a group of Americans is trying to send a pumpkin spinning through the air at Mach 1.

For more than a decade, the arcane art of pumpkin throwing — or punkin' chunkin' — has attracted an eclectic and eccentric group to the World Championships in Lewes, Delaware. This year, however, a group of five self-styled "high-tech rednecks" from Morton, Illinois, the undisputed world champions, is trying to punch the vegetable faster than the speed of sound.

For weeks, they have been practising for the Halloween event in the rolling cornfields around Morton, a town which supplies 80 per cent of America's canned pumpkin and calls itself the pumpkin capital of the world.

At the heart of the record-breaking attempt is an 18-ton, 100ft cannon made of ten-inch-diameter plastic pipe. The machine, powered by compressed air and mounted on an old cement mixer, will be tethered to a school bus for the trip to Delaware in a fortnight. The \$3,000 (£1,860) Aludium

Q36 Pumpkin Modulator, named after a cartoon gut that was used to destroy Earth, has set a world record for distance, flinging a pumpkin 2,710ft at more than 600mph.

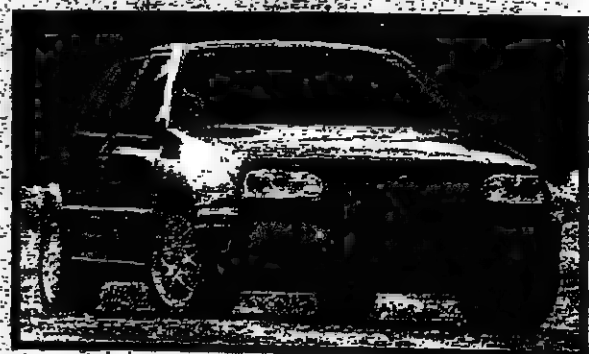
The only question is whether the gourd can survive its supersonic trip or will merely disintegrate in flight. Matt Parker, 28, a Morton businessman who is leading the team, is certain their efforts will be successful. "I know we can do it and I cannot wait to hear the crack when the pumpkin reaches the speed of sound," he said. "It will not be like a jet because of its roars, but it is certainly going to make a noise for all of us."

For the past 11 years, a varied assortment of contraptions has been dragged to Lewes to vie for bragging rights in a collection of pumpkin-tossing categories, including human-powered, centrifugal, catapult and air cannon.

Derived from an avil-throwing game once played on the Delaware coast, the rules of the modern contest are clear. Pumpkins must weigh between eight and ten pounds, should leave the machine intact and may not be propelled by explosives.

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This month The Times has teamed up with The Sunday Times and Churchill Insurance to offer readers the chance to win one of four exciting cars worth around £20,000 each.

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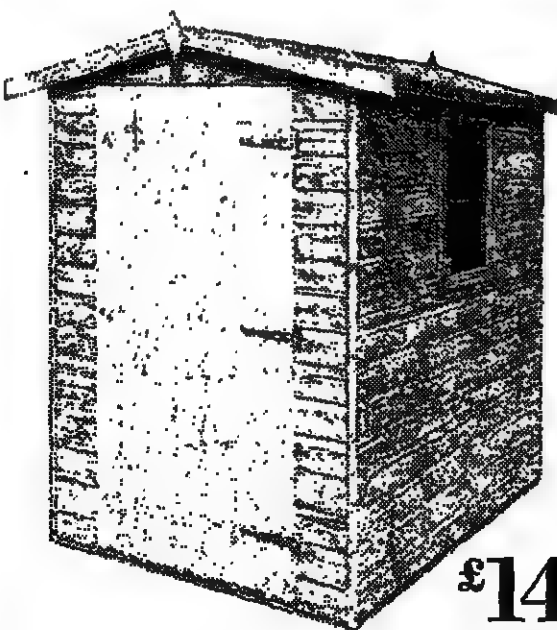
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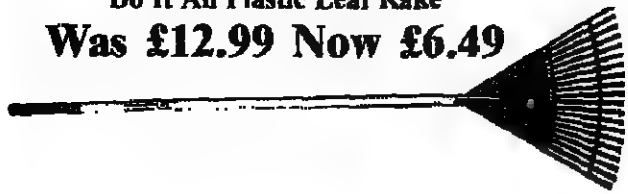


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Yeltsin tipped for Riviera's Russian jet set

A HUNDRED and forty years after Empress Alexandra turned Côte d'Azur into the holiday destination of choice for Russia's ruling class, a fresh Russian colonisation of the Riviera is under way by tourists, newly wealthy businessmen from the former Soviet Union, mafia barons and even, if local rumour is to be believed, President Yeltsin himself.

Last August the sale of the Château de la Garoupe at Cap d'Antibes unleashed a flood of speculation that the Russian leader had followed in Tsarist footsteps by purchasing one of the most beautiful properties on the French Mediterranean.

Officially, the château was bought for Fr55 million (£5.7 million) by an international property consortium, but both the local newspaper, *Nice-Matin*, and *Le Point*, the French financial weekly, re-

The Kremlin may now be plotting a new invasion of France, reports Ben Macintyre

ported that Mr Yeltsin, his daughter Tatyana, Dyachenko, or "Russian businessmen close to the President" were behind the purchase.

The rumour gained further weight last week when a member of the aristocratic English family that had owned the château since 1936 wrote, in the magazine *Country Life*, of her fears that the Russian President might neglect the estate and "leave the

ancient olive trees unpruned". Russian officials have denied the reports and, indeed, if it could be proved that Mr Yeltsin had bought himself such an expensive French property the political fallout in Russia would be disastrous.

Yet the story persists, and the estate agents and residents of Cap d'Antibes firmly believe that the magnificent château and its 25-acre garden, once rented by the likes of Aristotle Onassis and Cole Porter, has been bought by someone inside the Kremlin.

The belief that Mr Yeltsin has become a property owner on the Côte d'Azur may be based more on supposition than fact, but it reflects the massive recent migration to the area of former Soviet politicians and nouveau riche Russian tycoons — some entirely legitimate, and others whose wealth is more dubious.

The first influx of Russians to the French Riviera in the 1850s was followed by a second wave of White Russians at the start of this century. Since the collapse of communism, a horse, or at least a holiday, on the Côte d'Azur has again become a supreme mark of status in Russia.

A former official in the Soviet Foreign Ministry is said to have bought two villas near Nice for Fr80 million.



CHATEAU DE LA GAROUBE



Empress Alexandra, an early visitor to the Riviera, built a church in Nice for the benefit of her courtiers



The sale of Château de la Garoupe has unleashed rumours that someone in the Kremlin, perhaps President Yeltsin, below right, is the buyer



lution, casinos and widespread corruption along the southern coast of France have made it an obvious target for organised crime.

In addition to real estate, wealthy Russians have also begun to buy up other businesses in southern France such as restaurants, import-export operations and distilleries. Police suspect that such investments are often simply a cover for money-laundering.

Gangsters from the former Soviet Union are well established across the border in Italy and the combination of drugs money, property spec-

ulation, casinos and widespread corruption along the southern coast of France have made it an obvious target for organised crime.

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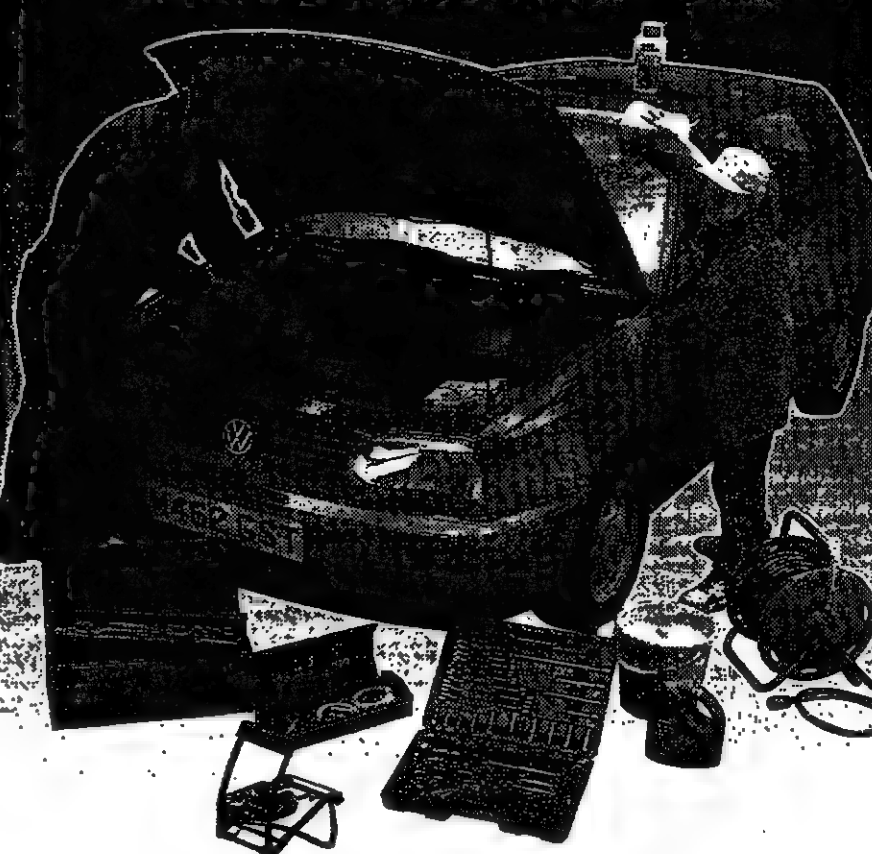
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Cash lament orchestrated by maestros



Tippet, Menuhin and Kennedy: harmony over subsidies

Tippet, Menuhin and Kennedy say lottery could fund instrument 'bank', reports Dalya Alberge

LEADING musicians including the composer Sir Michael Tippett and the violinists Lord Menuhin and Nigel Kennedy have called for lottery money to be spent on performers and their instruments, rather than on more buildings.

Sir Michael said yesterday: "It's badly needed for performers. There's not much point in having more money for concert halls if there is no money for the performers. One of the big problems in Britain is that so many orchestras have been on the verge of bankruptcy. Compare us with Spain or Germany, where practically all the orchestras are salaried and maintained by substantial public subsidy. In Britain, most are made up of freelance musicians who lead such a precarious living."

A similar tune was sounded by Lord Menuhin, who lamented that musicians are so badly paid: a rank-and-file performer in Britain averages

£20,000, against £50,000 in America. "I want people to earn enough to live a good life," he said. "Society has to provide that, whether in money or in violins. People should be able to lead life with dignity."

The two men were speaking after *The Times* reported earlier this month that musicians cannot afford to buy instruments. Anthony Woodcock, managing director of the Bournemouth Orchestras, said that performers who earn £18,000 a year cannot pay £50,000 for the tools of their trade; without better instruments, performances are suffering.

Nigel Kennedy suggested that lottery money could establish a central bank of instruments. The danger of buying instruments for individual orchestras, he said, was that if a player wanted to leave, he or she would have to go back to playing on "balsa wood". A

trust could enable players eventually to buy the instruments and play with the orchestra of their choice, assuring they were accepted.

He spoke of being struck by the quality of sound produced by overseas orchestras, which had strings to match their playing. In Britain, he said, talented players were constantly battling against their instruments when conductors asked for more. "Possibly the Arts Council could give orchestras better salaries. String players should be allowed a family. After a car, two kids and a normal house, on an orchestral salary there is nothing left apart from a bigger debt. They deserve more."

Nigel Brown, a Cambridge investment manager and amateur violinist, is among a handful of individuals in Britain who help musicians to acquire instruments. He, too, called for a central fund. "British players are suffering without good instruments," he said. "Our most talented musicians have their careers capped by inferior instruments. Having a really good instrument acts like a kick in a career."

In 1984, after attending a London Symphony Orchestra concert in which Kennedy played Brahms on a Guarneri lent to him by Charles Beare, one of the world's leading dealers, Mr Brown asked the violinist why no one had bought him an instrument. "He said, 'Because no one's offered'." Mr Brown was inspired to set up an instrument-lending scheme, through which players are able to buy



György Pauk: "The quality of Italian instruments is unsurpassed at the moment"

GYÖRGY PAUK

THE solo violinist, born in Hungary, plays a 1714 Stradivarius. "It is very beautiful," he said, recalling his disbelief some 26 years ago at being offered such an instrument.

"I was playing with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, for the second time. A violin collector who came to the concert came to see me in the artists' room and asked me to see his instruments. I did. I played about five of his instruments. He asked me, 'Which one do you like?' and then said, 'You can have it'."

He lent it to me. After five years, I felt uncomfortable. I thought he or his children might want it back. I asked him, 'Would you consider selling it to me?' He did, for a ridiculous price." The musician and the collector, an

American businessman and amateur musician, remain great friends.

Commenting on the difference between playing a Strad and a modern instrument, Pauk said: "The quality of Italian instruments is unsurpassed at the moment. I was on the jury last week of an international competition in Hanover. They had a lecture on Strads. They were talking about what makes it. It's the quality, the warmth, the depth of the sound. They've tried everything to analyse it. But up to today, it's been a secret."

DAVID NOLAN

LEADER of the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, he plays a 1770 Strozzi violin which, he said, "some people consider the equal of Strads". He paid £5,000 for his first



David Nolan: his violin is valued at £200,000-plus

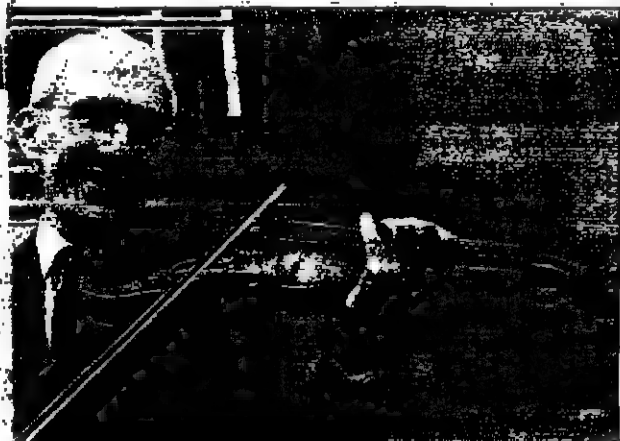


Julian Tear: "There is a difference between old and new"

JULIAN TEAR

A VIOLINIST with the Academy of St Martin-in-the-Fields Orchestra for ten years, who also freelances with ensembles such as the English Chamber Orchestra, he plays an Italian instrument made two years ago by Alceste Buffari. Its quality, he said, is superb. "The instrument I've got plays as well as older instruments. No question. But 99 times out of 100 there is a difference between the old and new ones. A lot of modern instruments don't measure up to older ones simply because they have not had the time."

He said that the maker is not well-known and produces only ten instruments a year. When he visited the workshop, there were ten instruments, all spoken for. "I would have bought any one."

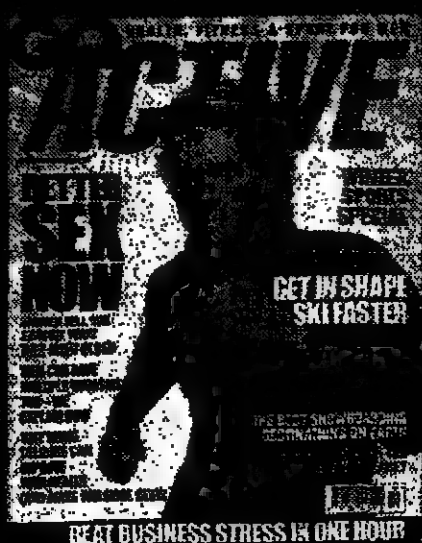


Nigel Brown: fears British players are suffering

10p

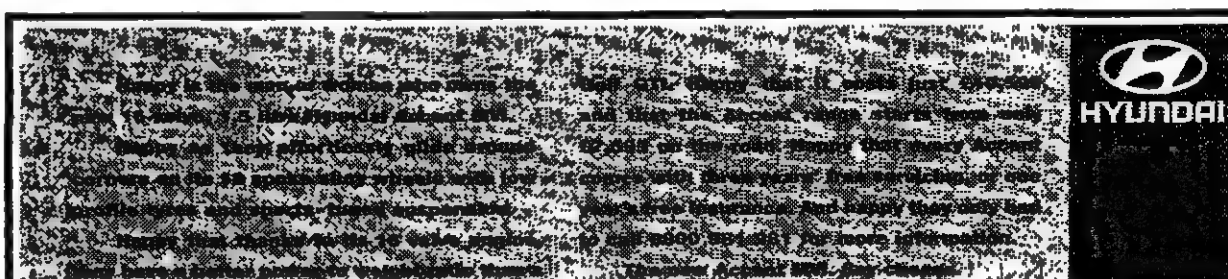
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THE SUNDAY TIMES

Blood on the street



Frank Partnoy, a former trader in the secret world of derivatives, is sending tremors through international high finance by taking the lid off the billion-dollar scandal of the Nineties

Read his exposé in *News Review* tomorrow

THE SUNDAY TIMES
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Woman wins claim for failed implants

A WOMAN who claimed her breasts were left grossly deformed after complications set in following the insertion of silicone implants was awarded £20,636 damages by the High Court yesterday.

Christine Williamson, a fashion designer, won the sum because of the hospital's failure to obtain her consent for surgery to remove her right breast and much of her chest muscle.

The court was told that her left breast was also left unnecessarily scarred by the surgery at St Bartholomew's Hospital in London in April 1994.

Mrs Williamson, 48, of Clapton, East London, was a psychologically vulnerable woman whose breasts were of "paramount" importance to her, Mr Justice Butterfield said.

Mrs Williamson, a now divorced mother of two, had the implants inserted in 1979. She began to suffer hardening of the breasts in 1982 and had several corrective procedures. In December 1992, she con-

Hospital must pay £20,000 after carrying out mastectomy without consent when breast implants began to leak, reports Ian Murray

sulted a plastic surgeon at Bart's, James Harvey-Kemble, complaining she had lost her confidence and her marriage was on the rocks because of the problem.

Mrs Williamson said she had told Mr Harvey-Kemble of her fears that the softening operation he performed had ruptured the right implant—a recognised risk of the procedure—but he had refused to treat her. Rejecting her negligence claim against the surgeon, the judge said Mrs Williamson was confused in her recollection. The surgeon had denied telling her that there was nothing he could do.

But the judge criticised the failure of another Bart's plastic surgeon, Dalia Nield, to

inform Mrs Williamson properly of her intention to carry out surgery in 1994.

Mrs Williamson had expected an operation to replace the silicone implants with saline versions. She did not see, and was not asked to sign, any further consent form or an amendment of the existing form. The absence of her signature pointed strongly to the form being altered out of Mrs Williamson's presence and after Mrs Nield had examined her.

Mr Justice Butterfield rejected Mrs Nield's claim that Mrs Williamson understood and accepted her explanation that her deteriorating condition called for more drastic surgery. He nevertheless rejected

Mrs Williamson's argument that the operation—a subcutaneous mastectomy—was both excessive and unnecessary.

Mrs Nield said she had never seen a worse case—silicone was everywhere, making the operation the only solution. Her view was backed by two other experienced doctors who attended.

The judge said he viewed the operation as necessary at that point or later because of leakage. The damages were awarded against Bart's, which is part of the Royal London Hospital and the London Chest Hospital NHS Trust, which had denied negligence.

Mrs Williamson said last night that when she had had the implants she had not realised how dangerous they could be. "Women should be warned that implants can rupture, and if that happens it is essential to get treatment immediately."

She said she hoped now to have a breast reconstruction, but this would cost £30,000.



Christine Williamson, who said the failure of the implants had damaged her confidence

Porch storm blows up into £30,000 bill

By PETER FOSTER

A PETTY row between two neighbours was settled yesterday after five years of legal wrangling at a cost of £30,000.

The dispute arose when Peter and Janet Grove decided to build a tiny porch on to their rear house to shield the front door from rain. The meagre construction, built by Mr Grove, a retired builder, protrudes 3ft into a common driveway and has remained unfinished for six years.

Yesterday, after much deliberation, three High Court judges overturned a county court ruling that had left the Grove family owing £15,000 in costs to their neighbour Derek Minor.

Mrs Grove said: "We had no idea that the porchway would cause all this trouble until a letter arrived one morning from Mr Minor's solicitor just after we started work on it. We stopped building and have been fighting a legal battle ever since."

"We kept trying to negotiate a settlement but Mr Minor always refused. Even the day before the case came to London we offered to pull down the porch, pay him

£4,000 towards his costs and give him right of way, but he still refused."

The hearing was told how the Groves, of Allscott, Shropshire, were faced with bitter opposition from Mr Minor, who claimed that the porch would obstruct access for vehicles to his cottage.

In February 1992 Mr Minor won his case at Telford County Court after Judge Desmond Perrett ruled that the porch did obstruct the right of way and ordered the Groves to pull it down. But the Groves, who did not have legal aid, decided to appeal.

Anthony Radevsky, for the couple, told appeal judges lords justices Hirst, Swinton-Thomas and Millett: "No vehicle has ever wished to use the access way to reach number 11 which was obstructed by it."

After the ruling Mr Minor, who also funded his own case, was ordered to pay all the High Court and county court costs, estimated at £30,000 by the Groves' lawyers.

Mr Grove said later that he would "quietly get on with building the porch".

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The case of the murderous messenger

Michael Gove sifts through the conflicting clues to find the guilty parties in the strange case of the massacre in the marketplace

WHO bludgeoned the Government's credibility? If it were Agatha Christie telling the story, it would be *Ten Little Spinners*. If it was on film, it would be *The Long Black Friday*. And if it was a novel, it would be *Charlie Whelan in the Red Lion* with the mobile phone.

The blame for finishing off the "honeymoon couple", Gordon and Tony, has been laid firmly at the door of those who brief on their behalf. An attempt to state clearly where Labour stood on the single currency led markets to fall and, with them, the stock of this administration.

The responsibility for sowing confusion where clarity was required has been pinned on the Chancellor's press secretary, the volatile Charlie Whelan, Whitehall's Bob Hoskins, who believes it's good to talk but only on a non-attributable basis.

The truth, however, is different. Mr Whelan was faithfully reflecting the leadership line in a manner authorised from the top. He has now been more spinned against than spinning. The problems Labour experienced last week, and experience still, spring from conflicting impulses within the Government between pragmatists and European idealists, and from the apparent ambitions of Peter Mandelson to be both messenger and meddler.

John Major once, presciently, described Europe as a wolf coming up the path to destroy his Government. This Government first heard the distant howl on Friday, September 26, with a story in the *Financial*



Who killed the couple in the honeymoon suite?

Times by Robert Peston, its political editor. He quoted "ministerial" sources who argued that the increasing likelihood of a successful launch for the European single currency was inclining the Government in favour of early entry.

The effect of the front page of the "city bible" was instant. The pound fell at the prospect of permanent union with the lira and escudo. A cheaper pound helps exports, and so shares shot up. The various combination of cheaper pound and higher share prices was exactly what the Treasury wanted and the Chancellor, Gordon Brown, was known to favour early entry to EMU, so the source of the story seemed clear.

Too clear for the Treasury. The day the story appeared, two of Brown's closest aides were at pains to deny they were flying any kites. They could not deny that there had been a leak from their department until they had talked to all the ministers, but both were adamant that Brown was not behind an article one called a "punt" and the other termed "bollocks".

On the Sunday after the *FT* story, the airwaves carried the sound of singing from the same hymn sheet as Brown and Robin Cook rubbished the Peston piece. The *FT*'s political editor robustly defended his story on *The World this Weekend* and insisted that it was the product of several conversations and not a speculative over-interpretation of one briefing. His adamant defence of speculation among other journalists to the real sources. The deep throat was believed

to belong to one of several middle-ranking ministers close to Blair or Brown and committed to a more pro-European stance. Doug Henderson, the normally cautious Europe Minister, and Geoff Hoon, the former MEP who is now Parliamentary Secretary at the Lord Chancellor's Department, were fingered. But the name most often whispered was that of Lord Simon of Highbury, the former BP

chairman and Trade Minister, whose commitment to the single currency was often advertised before he joined the Government.

The rumours attaching themselves to his name inspired the Shadow Trade Secretary John Redwood to prompt Lord Tebbit to table searching questions in the Upper House last Wednesday. On Friday, Simon deployed a familiar disavowal of ministerial responsibility and claimed he had been on holiday.

The search for Peston's source, although an entertaining sub-plot, was not, however, the question of first importance.

Whether the original story was faithful to Brown's inclination, and indeed, whether it was not its appearance created turbulence well beyond the markets. It fed an appetite within the press and the Labour Party for evidence of tension between a pro-single currency Chancellor and a more cautious Prime Minister. The existence of tensions between Brown and Blair may owe more to rivalry among their courts than dissension between the two men, but there are enough partisans on either side to lend rumours weight.

Several papers had been preparing new pieces on the theme for Sunday October 19. Egos aside, both Brown and Blair realised that continued coverage which placed them at loggerheads on the single currency, with Brown dragging Blair towards Brussels, would distract attention from other matters and risk a rerun of the debilitating speculation which had preceded Margaret Thatcher's ill-fated entry to the

ERM. It was decided that Brown would blow the whistle on the press's game by spelling out the genuine scepticism towards early entry which existed at the highest level.

Accounts differ as to who felt a statement was necessary: a Prime Minister determined to rein in his Chancellor, or a Chancellor annoyed at being traduced, but it was agreed that a definitive statement ruling out early entry to EMU should be made by the Chancellor. He had, until then, been disinclined to state authoritatively that the Government was cool on the subject. The only uncertainty was whether to couch the policy of standing aloof in chronological, or political terms - the lifetime of this Parliament or until 2001. An interview with the Chancellor had been fixed with *The Daily Telegraph* for Thursday the 16th, but *The Times*'s political editor, Phil Webster, aware of the genuine scepticism in Downing Street towards early entry, had been trying for about ten days to persuade Brown to state his feelings on the record. Since Webster had read the trend accurately, it was decided he should be given the necessary confirmation.

On the afternoon of last Friday, the 17th, Webster interviewed Brown by telephone at his Dunfermline base both about the single currency and the wider economy. Webster had been faced a passage on the single currency, including two crucial paragraphs agreed the night before by Brown and Blair. In them, Brown made clear that declining to enter in 1999 would mean the Government's task was "to deliver a period of

sustainable growth, tackle long-term weaknesses in the economy and continue to press for reform in Europe". "Sustainable", "long-term", "continue to press". The signals, as Webster noted, were loud and clear. It would take time, a long time, before Britain would enter after 1999. Webster appreciated that these paragraphs made obvious that in effect, no entry was possible in this Parliament, and had his interpretation confirmed by No 11.

Charlie Whelan took the precaution of alerting editors on other titles that *The Times* had a story which was neither a punt nor a profanity. He was not the only spin doctor to attest to the story's importance. Alastair Campbell, the Prime Minister's press secretary, briefed a number of journalists underlining the importance of *The Times* story. No 10 and No 11 were as one.

Whelan's briefings were conducted by mobile phone from the pavement outside the Red Lion pub in Whitehall, where he had been drinking with Ed Miliband, another of Brown's advisers. The informal nature of his spinning was used by others to undermine his authority, but although Whelan may not have been by his minister's side he was his master's voice.

Editors may have been informed early and in full, but others were left in the loop. Roger Liddle, the Europe adviser at the No 10 Policy Unit, nearly choked on his marmalade at a Foreign Office conference when he read *The Times* story on Saturday morning. Although some No 10 advisers, notably the economics expert Derek Scott, are gentle sceptics, Liddle is an ardent pro-European. His consternation was shared by an old friend, Peter Mandelson, Minister without Portfolio and, on this occasion, without the magic circle.

Mandelson, cool in his relations with Brown and arctic towards Whelan, was reported to be distressed at the sceptical turn and his exclusion. An alternative spin on the events of the weekend began to emanate. *The Mirror* on Monday 20th assured its readers policy had not changed. An exposed *FT* sought to play down the significance of the Brown interview, earning its political editor a dressing-down from Mr Campbell.

The mixed messages emanating from the Government had upset the markets. When Brown visited the City on Monday 20th, banks of red figures on dealers' screens signalled the markets' displeasure. The anger of pro-Euro

pears in the Blair circle, or rather those who were now uncomfortably outside it, found another outlet.

In the *New Statesman* on Thursday 23rd, an "inside account" of the week's events fingered Whelan and Campbell, who was apparently "ignorant about Europe", as well as confidently predicting what Brown would say in a forthcoming statement.

He would, the magazine predicted, review Britain's convergence with continental economies, and thus the prospects for EMU entry, on an annual basis. For sleuths at Westminster and the City, the fingerprints of Mandelson were all too apparent. The "annual review" idea had been floated to City figures from sources close to Mandelson over the previous weekend. When the idea was bounced off Brown's friends their response was categorical: such a strategy would fuel uncertainty, not dowse it.

When Brown addresses the House of Commons this Monday, he will need to provide greater clarity than he has done before if the Government's credibility is not to take another battering.

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		Gross % p.a.	Net Equiv % p.a.	Gross % p.m.	Net Equiv % p.m.
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£500+	5.50	5.00	-	-	-
First Choice	£500	1.70	1.50	-	-
(including bonus)	£500+	4.50	4.40	-	-
£5,000+	4.50	4.40	-	-	-
£10,000+	4.50	4.40	-	-	-
£25,000+	4.50	4.40	-	-	-
60 Day Plus	£1,000+	5.50	4.50	5.20	4.80
(including bonus)	£5,000+	5.50	4.70	5.70	4.80
£10,000+	5.50	4.70	5.30	4.80	-
£25,000+	5.50	5.30	5.10	5.10	-
£50,000+	5.50	5.30	5.10	5.10	-
£100,000+	5.50	5.30	5.10	5.10	-
£250,000+	5.50	5.30	5.10	5.10	-
£500,000+	5.50	5.30	5.10	5.10	-
£1,000,000+	5.50	5.30	5.10	5.10	-
Business 120 Account	£5,000+	7.00	5.40	6.80	5.40
(including bonus)	£50,000+	7.00	5.40	6.80	5.40
£250,000+	7.00	5.40	6.80	5.40	-
£500,000+	7.00	5.40	6.80	5.40	-
£1,000,000+	7.00	5.40	6.80	5.40	-
Mutual Bond	£500+	6.50	5.00	-	-
£5,000+	6.50	5.00	-	-	-
£10,000+	6.50	5.00	-	-	-
£25,000+	6.50	5.00	-	-	-
£50,000+	6.50	5.00	-	-	-
£100,000+	6.50	5.00	-	-	-
£250,000+	6.50	5.00	-	-	-
£500,000+	6.50	5.00	-	-	-
£1,000,000+	6.50	5.00	-	-	-
Monthly Saver	£10+	7.10	6.70	-	-
(Premium Rate)	-	-	-	-	-
High Return TESSA - Issue 2*	-	7.40	-	-	-
High Return 2 Feeder	-	7.40	5.90	-	-
Prizebond Following TESSA*	£500+	7.70	-	-	-
(including bonus)	-	-	-	-	-
Prizebond Following TESSA*	£5,000+	7.70	-	-	-
(including bonus)	-	-	-	-	-
Home Account*	£500+	4.50	5.44	-	-
(including bonus)	£5,000+	4.50	5.00	-	-
£10,000+	4.50	5.00	-	-	-
£25,000+	4.50	5.00	-	-	-
£50,000+	4.50	5.00	-	-	-
£100,000+	4.50	5.00	-	-	-
£250,000+	4.50	5.00	-	-	-
£500,000+	4.50	5.00	-	-	-
£1,000,000+	4.50	5.00	-	-	-
Special Asset	£2,500+	4.60	5.72	4.35	5.54
£5,000+	5.10	4.00	5.00	4.00	-
£10,000+	5.70	4.50	5.40	4.50	-
£25,000+	5.70	4.50	5.40	4.50	-
£50,000+	5.70	4.50	5.40	4.50	-
£100,000+	5.70	4.50	5.40	4.50	-
£250,000+	5.70	4.50	5.40	4.50	-
£500,000+	5.70	4.50	5.40	4.50	-
£1,000,000+	5.70	4.50	5.40	4.50	-
Prize Deposit	£1+	6.50	6.72	-	-
£10,000+	6.50	6.72	-	-	-
£25,000+	6.50	6.72	-	-	-
£50,000+	6.50	6.72	-	-	-
£100,000+	6.50	6.72	-	-	-
£250,000+	6.50	6.72	-	-	-
£500,000+	6.50	6.72	-	-	-
£1,000,000+	6.50	6.72	-	-	-

ACCOUNTS NO LONGER AVAILABLE TO NEW INVESTORS					
Account	Balance	Annual Interest		Monthly Interest	
		Gross % p.a.	Net Equiv % p.a.	Gross % p.m.	Net Equiv % p.m.
TESSAVER	£1+ (Date Rate)	6.25	6.20	-	-
£100+	6.25	6.20	-	-	-
£500+	6.25	6.20	-	-	-
£1,000+	6.25	6.20	-	-	-
£2,500+	6.25	6.20	-	-	-
£5,000+	6.25	6.20	-	-	-
£10,000+	6.25	6.20	-	-	-
£25,000+	6.25	6.20	-	-	-
£50,000+	6.25	6.20	-	-	-
£100,000+	6.25	6.20	-	-	-
£250,000+	6.25	6.20	-	-	-
£500,000+	6.25	6.20	-	-	-
£1,000,000+	6.25	6.20	-	-	-
Special Interest Bond - Issue 1	£500+	6.15	4.90	-	-
£5,000+	6.15	4.90	-	-	-
£10,000+	6.15	4.90	-	-	-
£25,000+	6.15	4.90	-	-	-
£50,000+	6.15	4.90	-	-	-
£100,000+	6.15	4.90	-	-	-
£250,000+	6.15	4.90	-	-	-
£500,000+	6.15	4.90	-	-	-
£1,000,000+	6.15	4.90	-	-	-
Prizebond	£5,000+	7.00	5.80	6.80	5.44
£50,000+	7.00	5.80	6.80	5.44	-
£250,000+	7.00	5.80	6.80	5.44	-
£500,000+	7.00	5.80	6.80	5.44	-
£1,000,000+	7.00	5.80	6.80	5.44	-
Monthly Bond Issue 1	£5,000+	7.20	5.80	7.00	5.80
£50,000+	7.20	5.80	7.00	5.80	-
£250,000+	7.20	5.80	7.00	5.80	-
£500,000+	7.20	5.80	7.00	5.80	-
£1,000,000+	7.20	5.80	7.00	5.80	-
TESSA Feeder Account 1	£5,000+	7.40	5.92	-	-
Classic TESSA Issue 2	£500+	7.40	-	-	-
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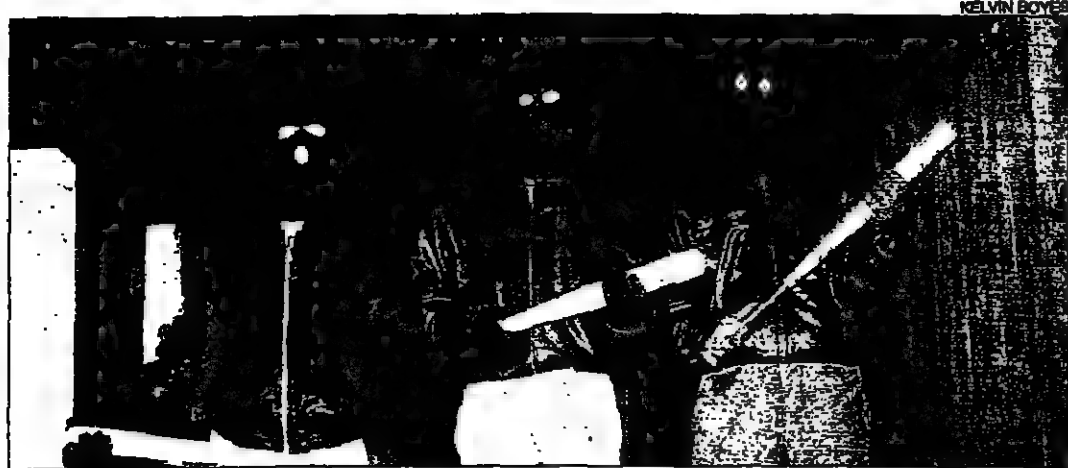
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A "punishment squad": the political wings espouse peace, but the violence continues

They talk of peace; the deeds are dirty

TALK to Mary Maskey about Northern Ireland's ceasefire and she snorts with derision. "That word makes me sick. It's just a joke. It means nothing — it never has and it never will."

Mrs Maskey — not her real name — is a young single mother with four small children. She and her family are living in a hostel near London, but she will not say where. Six weeks ago she was beaten senseless. Three weeks ago loyalist paramilitary thugs forced her to flee her native town of Larne in Co Antrim.

Twenty miles south of Larne, the political representatives of loyalist and republican paramilitary organisations sit at the Stormont peace talks, having solemnly committed themselves to the so-called Mitchell principles of democ-

The price of keeping paramilitaries at negotiations is to keep quiet about their thugs, reports Martin Fletcher

racy and non-violence. They can justifiably claim that the bombings and sectarian warfare have largely ceased. But on the tough, sprawling housing estates of Northern Ireland, the violence and intimidation continue unabated.

Mrs Maskey is a Roman Catholic who lived on a mixed housing estate. As she tells it, two masked men armed with baseball bats broke into her house at 2.45am. They went up to the bedroom where she was sleeping with her sister and

her baby daughter, and beat her unconscious.

Mrs Maskey suffered a fractured skull, had to have her right ear sewn back on, and is still partially deaf and partially blind in her right eye. Her baby lost her right index finger. Her sister required stitches to her head. She says the assailants were loyalist paramilitaries hired by a local drug dealer who had argued with a member of her family. After nine days in hospital, Mrs Maskey moved into her mother's house. Three weeks

ago a letter arrived. She thought it was a get-well card until she opened it. Inside were words to the effect of: "Get out of Larne while you can. Giving false accusations to the police doesn't work." Mrs Maskey and her children caught the 10pm ferry to Stranraer that night. "I couldn't breathe for fear," she said.

According to the Royal Ulster Constabulary, there have been 17 shootings, assaults, kidnappings and punishment beatings carried out by republican paramilitaries since the IRA renewed its ceasefire on July 20, and 25 by their loyalist counterparts. The total for the first 6½ months of the year was 143.

After a brief lull, the level of violence is creeping up to pre-



Hugh Lewsley after an IRA beating in 1995. This month his house was attacked when he criticised the terrorists

ceasefire levels. "It's quite clear that there are incidents, quite serious incidents, involving assaults and the exclusion of people from their communities still going on," an RUC spokesman said. "A number of these certainly fall into the category of paramilitary-style assaults."

Last Saturday, three masked men with a baseball bat dislocated the leg of a 21-

year-old man walking along a road in Lisburn, Co Antrim, just before 1am. At midday a gunman walked into a bookmaker's just off the Falls Road in West Belfast and shot an 18-year-old in both legs. That evening a group of masked thugs entered a house in Lisburn and broke the arms of two 16-year-old boys.

In the first two weeks of this month, Families Against Intimidation and Terror (FAIT), a Belfast human rights group, has been contacted by 15 people who have received death threats or been forced from their homes by the self-styled paramilitary vigilantes who control the estates.

FAIT said one couple with four children were ejected from a Protestant estate because their was a "mixed" marriage. The IRA evicted another family from an estate into which they had moved two weeks earlier because the father had once been a joyrider. The IRA ejected another man, recently returned from an IRA-imposed exile abroad, after a neighbour complained about his music.

Between June and September this year, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive has had to rehouse 132 families who have left their homes because of intimidation.

The paramilitaries' goal is "to let people know in areas where they are strong that they are still there and still maintain power and control", Sam Cushnahan, FAIT's director, said. If they stopped their violence, "people would begin to speak out against them. They would lose control."

In signing up to the Mitchell principles, Sinn Féin, the

IRA's political wing, and the loyalist Ulster Democratic and Progressive Unionist parties representing the Ulster Defence Association and Ulster Volunteer Force, promised to take "effective steps" to stop punishment beatings and killings. The violence continues but no one is calling the parties to account.

Both sides are equally culpable. The thugs generally operate on a "no claim, no blame" basis and no longer broadcast their affiliations. One authoritative source suggested that the Government and security forces were deliberately playing down the problem because they were "more concerned about keeping these paramilitaries in the talks".

Another major reason is that the victims are terrified of speaking out. Even Mrs Maskey, now hidden in southern England, refused to take a

second telephone call from The Times.

Hugh Lewsley, an independent councillor from West Belfast's Catholic Twinbrook estate, knows how the paramilitaries operate. Last week he called Sinn Féin a fascist organisation on television; two days later his house was attacked. In 1995 he was badly beaten after condemning the IRA for evicting families for being "antisocial".

Another man who has spoken out is Thomas Marley. His 21-year-old son Gerard had his legs broken by the IRA for joyriding. A week after the ceasefire, Gerard hanged himself from railings because of the constant taunts of the paramilitaries who crippled him. "The IRA say they are defending the people from the British," Mr Marley said, "but they are the ones who are terrorising the community."

MEMORIAL TO THE VICTIMS

There are many who are still suffering from the effects of the violence in Northern Ireland. Some are physically injured, some are psychologically damaged. Some are still in hospital, some are still in prison. Some are still in the hands of the paramilitaries. Some are still in the hands of the police. Some are still in the hands of the courts. Some are still in the hands of the community. Some are still in the hands of the world.

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All the president's mien

Mary McAleese is campaigning to be Ireland's new Mary Robinson. But there are invisible barriers to overcome

I am watching a tall slim woman of 46, dressed in a chic trouser suit (by Deborah Veale, Irish designer), striding down the main street of a small Irish town, her reddish hair well-coiffed, bestowing smiles and greetings left and right.

I have been here before: seven years ago exactly, when the buzz from Dublin was that a woman — a woman — might swing the presidency of Ireland. Mary Robinson changed things for ever. Another Mary is going to take over from her next Thursday when the nation votes. It will be either Mary McAleese or Mary Banotti, and with only three days to go (this weekend is a Bank Holiday in the Republic), it is neck and neck.

McAleese, who doesn't even have a vote in the South, still has much going for her, despite last week's tarrings with the Sinn Féin brush in what Mary Holland has called "a squalid poll that has opened tribal splits we'd hoped were healed".

Robinson was high-profile, energetic, marketable. She could wear Irish designer suits with style. She was new. But that was then: this is now. McAleese — equally presentable, just as brainy (she held, like Robinson, a junior professorship in law at Trinity College, Dublin at the age of 24) articulate (she's been a television presenter) and, a Roman Catholic, married to a dentist, appears a natural successor to Robinson.

But she remains a northern nationalist, and precisely because Robinson extended the limits and paved the way, the going is tough. I told her how many of her utterances sound identical to the early Robinson, especially when voicing hopes for the future. Has nothing changed or improved in the past seven years?

"This is the same country," McAleese said, "and the same issues are going forward for the next seven years. But the backdrop is different. The peace talks are the backdrop, which is what I would like to be able to help and encourage. I obviously come from a nationalist background: I am a nationalist who hopes for a political consensus soon, in Northern Ireland."

I remark that her speeches do not mention the fact that her family was left homeless after an attack on their Crumlin Road house in 1974, nor that her father's two pubs were burned and bombed. Nor that her profoundly deaf younger brother was beaten up and left for dead by loyalists.

"Everyone knows about that," she said, "and there comes a point where people wonder if you're obsessed by it. My commitment to forgiveness and tolerance does not come from my experience as a



Mary McAleese, chic and well-coiffed, campaigning in Thurles. "I came out of the tradition that says you must give something back to your country"

victim." There is obviously much of human interest in her story, but she is guarded towards the press, who watch the effusive public performances of an intelligent, confident, and highly presentable woman — all the ingredients for a good president — but judge her patronising, evasive and intimidating to those she might woo. No wonder she has found the press "not terribly helpful".

While campaigning, Mary Robinson used to sit down for 20-minute talks with each journalist, which gave us a chance of forming a personal view. McAleese allows five hacks a brief cluster just before she gives a speech, a minder standing by with a five-minute stopwatch.

The speech follows a formula. Her theme is building bridges, and the first gulf to be bridged is her northern origins. As usual, Mary finds a link with every place she visits. In Athlone, an aunt and uncle in the audience; in Tullamore, she "cut her political teeth at the Geoghegan's table"; in Tralee, there is a football connection; in Kerry, she had honeymooned.

Then there is the barefoot story. When her father was 14 he had to leave his home in the South and go North to find work. In his school photo, none of the children had shoes. Those times have gone. Her own three children (14-year-old daughter and twins of 12) are shot by Nike, Adidas and Reebok.

Next, she tells young audiences how she was the eldest of nine. (She is one of a clan of 60 cousins, her mother's family having followed the text about increasing and multiplying.) Just when she was taking her A levels, her youngest brother was born, and he cried all night. "I was the one who had to get the other children off to school, and I was looking after the baby at night as well."

"I began to feel it wasn't worth the effort, that university was not for people like me. I wanted to give up. The word stress didn't exist then. But one elderly teacher named Miss O'Friel noticed intuitively some change in me, and she started to arrive every morning to take me to school in her battered Morris Minor. I have often reflected on her act of kindness. I went to



university. I got a good job. But I came out of the tradition that says you must give something back to your country."

Finally, she extols Ireland's modernity. Two phrases recur: "Ireland is a nation with its shoulders

thrown back" and "We are the success story of Western Europe". She has worked in Dublin and in Belfast, where she is Pro-Vice-Chancellor of Queen's University. Belfast: the first woman and the first Catholic to hold that job. But of course, a Belfast upbringing has endowed her with an accent. It was a shock to me to hear radio, television and newspaper columnists griping about that "harsh, irritating" northern accent of hers. It is not, in fact, but it certainly grates on the ears in trendy Dublin.

The flat-capped man in the street in Mullingar, on the other hand, seizes my sleeve to say that McAleese is "the only one by a long shot. Carries herself well. Same mannerisms as Mary Robinson, same hand gestures. She'll sail through it."

Not quite, however. "Apollonian" the presidency is supposed to be. She may be able to strip away her own "baggage" and extend an "unflinching hand of friendship" to make peace with the Unionists, but Unionists (who ended up loving Mary Robinson) do not yet feel the

same way about McAleese. As she said: "The greatest barriers of all are in our own minds."

Her last speech on Thursday night was at the opening of the Ideal Home Exhibition in Dublin, a nightmarish display of all the most hideous things you could put inside a house. She made a noble speech, remembering seeing at the first Ideal Home Exhibition, her first firmed kitchen, her first Venetian blind.

She invoked Irish pride in home ownership but said it was depressing that the downside of wealth creation is that house prices are now beyond the reach of the young.

On the BBC's *Question Time* from Belfast, John Hume is speaking with soft-voiced reason. If Hume had stood, he might have proved more acceptable than any of the five existing candidates.

As it is, it will not be a shoe-in for either of the Marys, but it is McAleese who people are talking about. Which should work to her advantage in a chattering country — but might not.

Hard-up widow fails to raise a laugh

ON paper the Royal Opera's new production of Lehár's *Merry Widow* looked fail-safe. There is a Viennese conductor (Dietrich Bernet), a classy double act in Felicity Lott and Thomas Allen, who sing and speak their lines with innate stylishness, and the tried and trusted production team of Graham Vick (director), Richard Hudson (designer) and Ron Howell (choreographer). So it is hard to say precisely why the first night fell as flat as last month's *sachertorte*, though an audience resolutely determined not to enjoy itself had a lot to do with it. Smart line after smart line in Jeremy Sams's new translation went by without so much as a rustle of recognition, let alone a titter.

Perhaps it all boils down to a question of millions — and not the Widow's millions either. The famous £78 million from the Lottery, in which the company is supposed to be wallowing, is of course — as commentators either will not or choose not to recognise — earmarked for the rebuilding of the

OPERA FIRST NIGHT

The Merry Widow

Shakespeare Theatre

Opera House. The company itself is simply poverty stricken and on this showing looks it.

But opera is not got to look expensive, and this doesn't: the costume fabric looks cheap, there simply aren't enough people to populate even the Shakespeare Theatre's small stage, and Jennifer Phipps's flat lighting fails to breathe the slightest whiff of romance into the plain box set.

There are nice moments in Vick's direction — raucous showgirls as the Griseettes, and Hanna paying Danilo for his wait at the Act I curtain — and some curious miscalculations: the climax of Act II is killed stone dead by the whole company suddenly sitting down. It's all a bit too tasteful, and one longs for a sharp injection of good old-fashioned showbiz vulgarity. That goes for the music too. Bernet could risk a bit more schmalz without sending everyone's sugar-level soaring to health-threatening heights.

There is an excellent Valencienne in the young Armenian soprano Juliette Galstian, who can dance as well as she sings, and Claudio Desderi battles heroically with a speaking role in a language not his own. But the romantic tenor role is disastrously miscast, and the comic David Ross works too hard and in the wrong idiom — all those Benny Hill-style jokes must go. Or is the Royal Opera serious about attracting a tabloid audience?

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The Boston Tea Party and Louise

Bronwen Maddox on cheap childcare and anti-British bias

It is a misfortune to be British in a Boston courtroom. That was my first thought, watching the careful, anxious, utterly compelling testimony of Louise Woodward, the British au pair accused of shaking one-year-old Matthew Eappen to death. My second reaction is that America is in a mess on the whole question of childcare. The seminar which Hillary Clinton hosted in the White House on Thursday conspired in the delusion that childcare is cheap — one the country must soon regret.

Whichever way one's sympathies lie, the Louise Woodward trial, which resumes on Monday, is a nightmarish case. At its heart, as the packed courtroom heard on Thursday, is conflicting, complicated medical evidence about the cause of the baby's death. The prosecution says he had injuries caused by shaking; the defence that he died from undetected internal bleeding which was weeks old. That medical uncertainty plays on every working parent's fear about what exactly happens at home during the day. It also opens the door to all the nationalistic prejudices which can be projected on to Louise Woodward's blank round face.

Those prejudices exist. Many people in Boston are outraged at suggestions that a young woman might not get a fair trial in their town just because she is British. But the depth of anti-British feeling in Boston can run deeper than innocent visitors might suspect. The British see Boston as the American city which, with its gaslights and brick townhouses, most resembles home.

I write as someone with a large web of Boston Irish and Italian relatives on one side of the family. For a start, there is the still-powerful Irish element in the city's politics. No politician seeking higher office, such as Tom Reilly, the district attorney in charge of the case, will gain many votes by being seen to go soft on the British.

Further back, there is Boston's role as the crucible of the American Revolution, most famously in the 1773 Boston Tea Party, when merchants tipped the tea of the East India Company into Boston Harbour in protest against the company's monopoly, imposed by Westminster. Boston schoolchildren still recite the tale of "the midnight ride of Paul Revere" to warn the town that "the British are coming".

In some quarters, the British are still the enemy, even if they come in the guise of young schoolgirls. It is hard not to think that these factors have played a part in decisions such as making the charge against Louise Woodward one of first-degree murder, and refusing to grant her bail. Her bail application was denied even though she offered to wear an electronic tag and to stay with a prominent member of the local church, and even though her parents had offered to pledge their home as security. The influential Bos-

ton Globe attacked the court for the decision, accusing Mr Reilly of playing to anti-British sentiment.

Nor are British reserve and a British accent helpful to Louise Woodward. As she took the stand on Thursday, she displayed exactly the qualities you might want in an au pair: she was careful, ordered, methodical. But amid the drama of an American court, a British accent sounds clipped and flat. Her plump, impassive face helps her in that it gives the lie to the prosecution's case that she was a giddy teenager, but it damns her in the eyes of many who find her altogether "too calm". Diana, Princess of Wales's *Panorama* eyes and tear-swallowing voice would have helped her more, one suspects.

The real lesson from the case, however, is that America is indulging itself in the belief that childcare can be cheap. When you look at Louise Woodward, the folly is obvious. You cannot hire an 18-year-old, pay her far less than a trained adult on the ground that you are giving her foreign experience, deny her a grown-up social life and still expect her to assume the responsibilities of an adult.

That is a lesson the Clintons should already know. In 1993, President Clinton lost Zoe Baird, a nominee for Attorney General, to the "Nannygate" scandal, when it was revealed that she employed two illegal immigrants to look after her children, and also failed to pay them social security. Her explanation was that she was simply doing as thousands of professional women had done.

At the other end of the social scale, America's ambitious welfare reform experiment assumes a huge expansion of government-provided childcare. State governments plan to cut off benefits entirely to force people to find work. Insisting that the rules apply to single mothers, even those with babies just months old, many state governments are supplying childcare free of charge.

But this is costing a fortune, which may not be sustainable. Nor is there any reassurance that this "care" is good for these infants. Think-tanks are already worrying about the long-term effects.

That is why Hillary Clinton's initiatives, announced on Thursday, sound so hollow. Federal spending on the grand scale was not on offer, she made clear. She left behind her the old-fashioned favouritism of politicians with no money, "public-private partnerships".

Ten years from now, it will be harder to keep up that pretence. Childcare may well be the factor that causes the welfare experiment to unravel, and which forces working parents — even if not always mothers — to spend more time at home. Whether or not Louise Woodward did the things of which she stands accused, she is the victim of America's wishful thinking that childcare comes cheap.

NATURE NOTES



Sycamore spinners (*Muddleris singlecurrencis*)

The genus propagates by dissemination with a heavy spin (see fig 1a). Not always successful (see fig 1b), the effect is to sow seeds of confusion.

A collection of Nature Notes is now available in book form. To order a signed copy, see Weekend Page 13

The sceptical temptation

Brown should not rule out EMU, but wait and spin, says John Lloyd

IF EMU is successfully launched, Britain will be a part of it. This is as near to a fact — not a Labour or a Conservative fact, but a British Government fact — as it is possible to come about a political decision still to be made.

This fact underpins the tortured manoeuvrings over this past week, which are set to culminate in a statement to be given to the reassembled House of Commons on Monday by the Chancellor. These manoeuvrings point to two worrying states of affairs: first, that there is a potential breach between the Prime Minister and the Chancellor, although not the one previously advertised; and secondly, that we may be about to have a decision taken to rule out entry to the European single currency for this Parliament, a decision which runs counter to prudent governance.

The breach between the two most powerful politicians in the country was advertised as being over Europe, with Tony Blair said to be sceptical and Gordon Brown an enthusiast. For all the nuances which exist in their positions, they do not amount to a quarrel. Both men believe that Britain should be part of a European currency that works and that to stay out would be damaging. But both also believe that economic and political reasons speak against early entry.

The tension between them is not over Europe, but is a matter of power. It has been dramatised in the past week by the issue of spin-doctoring, although the essence of the problem is not what the doctors did or did not spin, but what they represent.

Alastair Campbell is the Prime Minister's press secretary, and effective head of the Government Information Service. Charlie Whelan is Gordon Brown's private and political press secretary, who has no formal status in Government at all. He is part of the close and talented group of aides with whom Mr Brown has surrounded himself. He is not there, as other special advisers are, to assist on policy. He is explicitly there to promote the profile of the Chancellor.

This is a uniquely powerful Chancellor. Well before Labour came to Government, he envisaged Treasury control over much of the government machine — especially over the main spending departments such as Health, Social Security and Educa-

tion — in part because they spend so much money but in greater part because they required restructuring and he wished to decide on, and in some measure even actually to do, that vast work. He has appointed a number of business people to think through this restructuring, all working in parallel with, and no doubt in contradiction to, departmental ministers and their advisers. Mr Brown's Welfare to Work scheme involves a recasting of the delivery of services and benefits, of the shape of education and of assumptions about work.

He is a very mighty baron. The scope of his power encompasses not just a Treasury of unusual ambition, but a patronage which can extend protection to ministers such as Harriet Harman, the Social Security Secretary. She has frosty relations with Frank Field, her deputy, who has been entrusted by the Prime Minister with the task of rethinking the welfare state.

In a speech last month to a conference on "Modernising the Policy Process", Peter Mandelson, Minister without Portfolio and still the closest of aides to the Prime Minister, endorsed Ferdinand Mount's description of the existing governmental system as "a loose baronial monarchy". The large tasks new Labour had set itself, he said, "demand a different, more effective system of government", with a "strong centre at its hub".

Before it has strengthened itself, the centre is challenged by the vast barony of the Treasury, its influence and patronage spreading throughout Government. Mr Whelan's crime is not his spin-doctoring, nor even that he has constituted a separate power centre, one with advisers who will not — as do civil servants — seek to ensure that Treasury concerns ultimately mesh with Prime Ministerial ones, but who are single-minded in the pursuit of his agenda. The Prime Minister and the Chan-

cellor remain close. As in Opposition, so in Government, they tend to meet without others present and to settle matters — to the fury of civil servants. But outside, their entourage and supporters fight a subterranean war of advantage — as if the heads of the Montagu and Capulet clans had agreed amicably to run Verona, while allowing their henchmen to lay ambushes for each other in the alleys. Mr Mandelson believes that the wound Mr Brown inflicted on himself when he gave Mr Blair a clear run for the party leadership after the death of John Smith still bleeds. If so, the Chancellor stanches it by activity and the exercise of power. This past week, when his camp was seen to have mishandled an attempt to make clear that Prime Minister and Chancellor were united on Europe, he has suffered a setback: Mr Blair's ginger handling of his longtime ally may, after this, be less tinged with the guilt of having surpassed one to whose leadership qualities even he had once deferred.

What will be the outcome for policy? Mr Brown, it is now being said — or spun — will put an end to all speculation next week and rule out, finally, entry into EMU in this Parliament. Both Mr Campbell and Mr Whelan briefed after the Chancellor's interview with this newspaper a week ago that his cloudy comments meant no entry this side of an election. It is hard to believe that both could have so mistaken the messages they were given as to distort utterly the messages they passed on.

But I hope they did. For the Government's position before it hardened over this past week did make economic sense. It did not make short-term political sense, and if that consideration wins, it means that the worst side of new Labour triumphs over the better.

In discussions on EMU over the summer, it was recognised that economics and politics told against first-wave entry. The business cycle was out of kilter with the Continent, and sterling was overvalued; at the same time, a steady majority of the British refused to be attracted to the

loss of sterling as their currency. The antidote was education, education, education — to win the people over to a view of the European Union more positive than that dinned in by years of near-chauvinism dressed up as statesmanship. Paddy Ashdown and Lord Jenkins of Hillhead were enthusiastic about an early referendum on entry while Labour was popular and the Opposition incoherent. This was considered, and rejected.

The posture decided upon was thus for delay — but delay interwoven with enthusiasm, and a gradually intensifying rhetorical offensive in favour of the European cause. And not just rhetoric: the Government has broken through the taboo which the Tories sought to erect about the social chapter, and published a White Paper allowing the incorporation of the European Convention on Human Rights into British law.

Here, was a reasonable, if undramatic, position. It was uncertain, but could not be otherwise. For the Government cannot know if EMU will succeed; how sterling will react; how much pressure will fall on

British finance and industry if it does not succeed, nor how much pressure business — and organised labour — will put on the Government to get in quickly. And since it does not know, it should leave open the door of possibility of entry in this Parliament. It may not be likely, but it is possible. It is prudent guardianship of the nation's interests to say so, and to act upon it.

We should hope that Mr Brown reflects on this before he rises next week. Uncertainty, to be sure, is unwelcome to the City, but until last week, the City lived happily and profitably with it. Ruling out entry seems driven more by political than by economic considerations.

The Conservatives have responded in kind: their decision this week to rule out entry for two Parliaments, not one, is an aping of the worst of new Labour. William Hague's disturbing propensity to steal his opponents' marginality. Labour should have the courage of its necessary uncertainty, and boldly speak out for continued sitting on the fence.

The author is associate editor of the New Statesman. Simon Jenkins will return next week.

Are you a twitcher or a dude?

Simon Barnes on birdwatching and its pecking order

I dipped out on the Siberian rubythroat. Didn't even try for it. I left it to the several hundred twitchers who surrounded the poor windblown little scrap of feathers that fetched up in Dorset this week. So I was well and truly gripped off, wasn't I?

I don't twitch. That is to say, I don't chase rare birds. I don't even keep a list, despite the Bill Oddie Rule which states that all birders keep a list, even if it's only a list of the number of times they tell people they don't keep a list. And besides, I have left it a bit late to join the elite of twitcher society. About ten years ago, a life list of 300 — that is to say, 300 species of bird that you have seen in Britain — was considered pretty good going. But soon, it was not until you reached 400 that you had broken the sound barrier and were cruising towards the upper levels of twitching.

Now, if you want to sip at the high table, then breaking 400 still leaves you with a marathon to travel. The top man in twitching is Ron Johns, who is now on 513. Among those close behind is Richard Millington, on 500, who runs Birdline, the twitchers' nationwide telephone information service.

I obtained these figures from Lee Evans, not so much the heir apparent to Ron Johns as the Bolognabrook. He is on 498. I reached him on his mobile in the Isles of Scilly, where he was chasing autumn migrants. "Much about," I asked, the classic, indeed, the only meaningful birders' question. "Nah. Only common yellow-throat and blackpoll."

I am not at the high table, nor near enough to scramble for the crumbs. But I know enough not to say: "I saw a Mediterranean gull in my garden." No twitcherspeak please. I did. Med gull the other week. Garden tick. I did, too. But oh, the condescension, even contempt. I would arouse if it had been my first Mediterranean gull. Med gull? Huh! Dudes' tick!

A dude, you see, is a person who has binoculars, likes birds, but is not to be taken seriously. An amateur, not an expert; a dilettante, not a virtuoso; a dabber, not a Kenner. Metaphorically speaking, everybody is either a twitcher or a dude.

Now it is possible that I have given the impression that the world of twitchers is deeply status-conscious, to the point of snobbery. That there is a hierarchy that amounts to a caste system. If I have given this impression, then I have done an absolutely first-class job.

Twitching is riven with envy, ambition, pride, shame, hope and fear. Just like every other world. Twitching has its top people who have earned their place. Its young aspirants, its threatening rivals, its no-hopers, and never-women. This does not make twitching unique.

Try hanging your blazer on Ian Botham's peg at a Test match. Try bagging the place by the radiator if you are an apprentice jump jockey. Try taking Tony Blair's chair at a Cabinet meeting. Try, for that matter, sitting in Mr Wilkins's chair stall — Mr Wilkins, who has led the choir (by about half a bar) for the past 40 years.

It is tempting to assume that English people must create a class system wherever they find themselves. But it more to do with the human hunger for hierarchy. If we can't be boss, then it helps to know who is. It is not so much snobbery as an ineluctable part of human nature. Meanwhile, status-seekers, something for the weekend. There's a Blyth's reed warbler and a pied wheater in Yorkshire as I write...

Regal rider

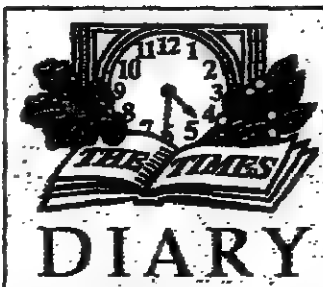
COCKING a snook at the dreary notion of a bicycling monarchy, King Juan Carlos is rapidly becoming the motorbiking King. The Spaniard has developed a dangerous weakness for white-knuckle rides on classic British motorbikes and is considering a dash round the notorious Isle of Man TT course. The King has been dropping hints that he would love a spin on a Manx Norton, the legendary machines which growled to triumph in the 1950s. This has been discreetly conveyed to Allan Robinson, the secretary of the TT Riders Association. He has responded by sending an invitation to Madrid, suggesting that the King ride in a "lap of honour" before next year's Isle of Man race. In 90 years, the race has claimed 170 victims.

"I'm not surprised the King admires the Manx Norton," puffs a proud Mr Robinson. "For anyone who was young in the 1950s, it was the bike." The King has acquired a private

collection of classic bikes and presents the trophies at the Spanish Grand Prix, but has never graced the handlebars of a Norton. But fear not — Summerfield Engineering, a little firm in Derbyshire, will supply a 500cc machine. "We are delighted to offer a bike fit for a king," splutters my man in the goggles, one Mike Summerfield. So will the monarch be flying around the 37-mile circuit? "This is something," purrs a delectable señora in the Spanish Royal Household, "that His Majesty is considering personally."



"Sorry, I didn't recognise you without your socks."



Brawn loser

RECENTLY I became acquainted with Ian Robertson, the former Scottish rugby player and commentator. By happy chance he coached the Prime Minister through his Oxford entrance exams while a teacher at Fettes.

Tony Blair was a real smart***, he tells me. "Tragically I taught him to read and write, but that was after his A levels. He was very bright and probably one of the best students I ever had, but he only got into Oxford," Robertson is

OLD TIMES "Our sovereignty doesn't belong to the Government to give away." (Frederick Forsyth, who once addressed an anti-Euro rally with the late Jimmy Goldsmith but now tells a group of Oxford students that he never had anything to do with the Referendum Party.)

a Cambridge man. "Tony was a very sharp operator, but most certainly not a sportsman. He was made to play but he didn't make it into any of the teams."

REVENGE is in store for Tony Blair. The opening to the Commonwealth shindig with its bongo drums and New Labour optimism was too-curling lone poem chanted by teenage girls was so banal, it could have been penned by the Poet Laureate. At least Alastair Campbell insisted that bagpipes should still be played. But Edinburgh Castle is not satisfied: pipers plan to play the Highland Laddie, a jibe at Mr Blair, who has shown scant enthusiasm for Scotland since Fettes.

Lean time

ONE OF Yorkshire's grandest stately homes may be reduced to a pile of 15th-century rubble: the walls of Ripley Castle, home to Sir Thomas Ingilby, are tilting so wildly that the place might fall down.

Sir Thomas, who inherited the pad for his 18th birthday, is clearly nervous. "One wing was built without foundations and the floors are collapsing as the walls lean 11in from vertical," he says.

Rather than be turfed out, Ingilby hopes to raise £750,000 with help from that social security office to the aristocracy, English Heritage. He should avoid dosing down in the stable-block: it is being held up with scaffolding.

THIS regime is beastly to information officers. The latest victim is Graham Blackmore, of the Ministry of Agriculture. Two days after a "free and frank" chat over his role, Blackmore was rushed to hospital with suspected angina. Happily he is now recovered. "Graham was already under stress. He's had BSE for over a year," I am told. Wrestling with the agricultural effects rather than the disease, I trust.

Cut and blow

BRUCE Willis has had trouble getting his hair cut. To test the ease with which normal scots can get into fashionable joints, Watchdog phoned Nicky Clarke, crimpier to Cherie Booth and other regal types. Asking for a quick snip, he was told the master groomer was booked until the new year. Calling again as "Bruce Willis" (who is an American actor), he was told he could be done that day. When Mr Willis — a pig farmer from Swindon — turned up for his trim, he strangely found the stylist "too busy".

NEW TIMES The Royal Naval Museum in Portsmouth is moving into the boozie business. In time for Christmas, it will sell a range of French wines. Inhibitors will be able to choose from Nelson's Claret or Trafalgar Burgundy. It all sounds rather bloodthirsty.



Game on: Kate Alderton and Nina Conti; Tamara and Jack

PARTY TIME HAMPSTEAD was playing its favourite game: the generation game. A play there brought together Kate Alderton, the daughter of John Alderton and Pauline Collins, and Nina Conti, the daughter of Tom Conti. Ms Collins's screen lover in *Shirley Valentine*: Kate was watched admiringly by her "old friend".

Jack Davenport (Miles in *This Life*). Also present was, er, Tamara Beckwith. All raved about *Big Life*, a surrealism. But Jack, grumbling that he not been told if there would be a new series of *This Life*, seemed reluctant to meet Ms Beckwith. "What would I say to her?" he implored. This is a question that has stumped many fine brains.



THE BILL FOR RIGHTS

Change is justified only if British rights are better protected

The Human Rights Bill introduced yesterday by the Government not only redeems a manifesto commitment; it is the fruit of long political and legal debate. The incorporation of the 1951 European Convention on Human Rights into British law has support from principled advocates across the political spectrum. They argue that this convention, drawn up after the war with the aim of ensuring that no European country would again violate basic human rights as Nazi Germany had done, embodies the finest in this country's legal traditions. Britain took the lead in drafting it and was its first signatory. But Britain, almost alone of the signatories, has not folded this convention into the body of domestic law.

That means that plaintiffs must take their cases to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, as 50 have successfully done since 1966. This is an expensive and long drawn out process. This Bill would enable Britons to seek redress under the convention in the courts of this country.

Equally principled have been the reservations expressed. They begin with the general terms in which this short convention defines the human rights it protects and, still more importantly, the sweeping terms — such as "national security... or health or morals" — in which restrictions on the exercise of these rights are framed. As the Government's White Paper says, interpretations of the convention have evolved down the years to reflect "changing social attitudes". In Britain, framing laws to protect rights in the light of social evolution has always been a matter for Parliament. That process, whatever its detractors, has been a democratic guarantor of liberty.

However true it may be that the convention reflects the spirit of Magna Carta, the fact remains that such generality is at odds with the detailed, case-law-based practices of British justice. The justification for incorporation could only be that it enlarged the freedoms of the citizen under the law. But some articles in the convention could be interpreted in such a way as to restrict them instead. The question, who decides, is therefore of paramount importance.

Hence the second, equally serious reservation, which is that incorporation could erode

divisions established down the centuries between Parliament's legislative supremacy and the strictly interpretative function of the judiciary. This would certainly have been the case had the Government opted for a "strong" form of incorporation, empowering judges to exercise the doctrine of "implied repeal" and strike down any laws they found to be incompatible with the convention. In the most radical constitutional upheaval since the 1689 Bill of Rights, judges would have found themselves in a position, with which most would feel profoundly uncomfortable, of dictating to Parliament.

With the important exception of secondary legislation, the Bill presented by Jack Straw has not ventured down this path. Ministers will be required to show that all new legislation complies with the convention. But in the case of existing laws, the powers of the courts will be limited to drawing the attention of Parliament to any "incompatibility" with the convention. The Government would then move to change the law — as it already does if it loses a case at Strasbourg. But until it did, the legislation would remain in force.

That reduces the risks of clashes between the courts and Parliament; but does not eliminate them because in other respects, this Bill is less cautious. All public authorities will be legally bound to comply with the convention. If a court judges that they have done so, it may quash their decisions — even if they are otherwise lawful.

Still more disturbing is the proposed "fast track" for changing laws, following an adverse declaration by the courts. The Government proposes to do this under 90-minute orders. Such orders can be rejected by Parliament, but scarcely scrutinised or amended with due care. Worse still, in "particularly urgent" cases, the order would take immediate effect, although it would expire after a short period if not approved by both Houses. Some might see this as only a step short of government by decree, hugely augmenting executive power at the expense of the legislature. The Government should give this deeper thought. The convention is noble in ambition and sweeping in scope. But this Bill could shift the balance between Parliament and the courts, irreversibly and in ways that may not be evident for some years.

FIRST LADY, SECOND LOOK

Mrs Clinton may leave a legacy for Robert Dole

Farewell then Lady Macbeth. Hello, Mother Teresa. Hillary Clinton will celebrate her 50th birthday with a glittering gala in Chicago tomorrow. Last week she took centre stage at a White House conference on childcare issues. Next week she will visit Northern Ireland and then travel to Quebec for a seminar on health and welfare policy hosted by Tony Blair. The First Lady is determined to reposition herself, for the remainder of her time in Washington, as the kinder, gentler Mrs Clinton.

That she should seek an alternative image is entirely understandable. In truth, Mrs Clinton holds one of the most impossible posts in American politics. The notion of the First Lady has no formal status. Despite that, it has considerable standing. In this century, the position was personified by Eleanor Roosevelt. Mrs Clinton's courting of controversy therefore puts her in excellent company. But she was, at one point, the most disliked First Lady on record.

She brought many of those problems on herself. The idea of a "co-presidency" was an affront to American democracy. The President's decision to put his wife in charge of his healthcare proposals was a disaster for both of them. The shadow of Whitewater — and the apparent misuse of the late Vincent Foster's files — still hang over Mrs Clinton. She could yet face charges of obstructing justice. While she is stoutly defended by American feminists, Mrs Clinton may well

have done their cause more harm than good. She may come to be seen, more sympathetically, as a transitional figure. Most of her predecessors were not political figures. She has strong views on almost every issue, yet it was assumed that, once she married a man almost addicted to election campaigns, she could not seek a political career herself.

One of the features of the last presidential contest was that Elizabeth Dole outshone Mrs Clinton. Mrs Dole, a former Cabinet member under Ronald Reagan and George Bush, would have been an exceptionally powerful adviser had her husband sat in the Oval Office. Mrs Clinton was apparently perplexed that her rival could be so political but strikingly popular. In truth there was no paradox. It was the very fact that Mrs Dole had openly sought power in her own right that made her respectable. Although a decade older than Mrs Clinton, Mrs Dole is, in many senses, the truly modern woman.

Washington is now awash with speculation that Mrs Dole might run for the White House herself in three years' time. Democratic strategists — in solemn mood — are almost as one in the belief that she would be by far the most difficult Republican to beat. It is a little early — with 1,110 days left — to assess her electoral prospects. It would, though, be the supreme irony if the person who benefited from the highly activist precedent set by Mrs Clinton were Robert Dole, as, ex First Lord of the United States?

ROUND THE READING ROOMS

The dome is a cathedral, but the library is the global bookshelf

The Round Reading Room of the British Library will close for the last time this evening after 140 years. As with the death of all such venerable institutions, there is room for sentiment. The room's mission statement was magnificently humane: to make available free of charge any book that has been published (at least in the English language). Its design was a cathedral of the book. Books lined its walls, the readers' desks formed the spokes of a wheel, the hub provided space for the catalogue, and over all soared the dome. Its history is extensive and eccentric.

If all the books read, written, researched and plagiarised there were stacked, they would fill several miles of shelf. And many of them might even be worth reading. Stories have been set in the Reading Room, by such as David Lodge, Malcolm Muggeridge and Max Beerholm. The novels tend to be detective stories, not concerned with scholarship so much as with getting the body into the stacks in one of the keepers' trolleys.

Maxwell spent years writing *Das Kapital* there, and Lenin and Trotsky used it as their home from home before they returned home to blow up other men's homes. Bernard Shaw did most of his reading there. And Eric Partridge spent 50 years at desk K1, interrupted from his pioneering studies of slang only by such diversions as Wimbledon fortnight and the Second World War. Samuel Beckett Butler was another daily presence who always sat in the same seat.

Louis MacNeice wrote a poem to the Reading Room, with an extended simile about a beehive. "Honey and wax, the accumulation of years." And his honey and wax (and debris) comprise the greatest collection of 1,000 years of English literature.

But sentiment for the Reading Room should not sag into sentimentality. For it can sound like mourning for a plush Victorian restaurant, where one would be alarmed to look into the kitchen. The Reading Room even smells of cabbage, though the keepers in their blue uniforms were dressed more like prison wardens than waiters. The central heating was oppressive, which was why impoverished intellectuals such as Gandhi came to roost there. And it could take days and sometimes months to get served.

The reading rooms in the new British Library will open their doors next month. As we report in the *Magazine*, they will provide modern facilities, a better menu and faster service. They will be open free to the general public, not just to the elite selected for a reader's ticket. And they will conserve the books instead of destroying them by constant shuttling around London. They are a step on the road to the global bookshelf. And for those haunted by old ghosts, the Round Room will be preserved, with its blue seats, desks and reading lights, as a library related to the British Museum's collections. So it will always be an historic room of the extraordinary culture of the British book.

Lord Chancellor's legal aid reforms

From Mr Austin Mitchell, MP for Great Grimsby (Labour)

Sir, The proposal by Lord Irvine of Lairg to extend the use of conditional fees (report, October 18; leading article, October 23) may or more likely may not bring more control of legal aid and more justice for the middle classes.

It will deprive some lawyers of their excessive fees. Yet it is certainly not going to bring justice to the great majority of people in their disputes with the wealthy and powerful. By their very nature their cases initially don't look promising. The cards are always stacked against them. Who is going to fight them on conditional fees?

If legal aid goes, something has to replace it. Conditional fees are not enough. There ought to be a safety net, as Benedict Bismberg described in your Law pages (October 21). This would consist of salaried lawyers taking on civil and criminal litigation. Legal aid has a bad reputation because it so vastly enriches lawyers who are defending litigants whose poverty is often cosmetic.

What is required is a national network of law centres and public defenders based in every large community. This would be cheaper than legal aid, because the lawyers would be employed, not part of private practice, and they would be non-profit-making. Conditional fees could accrue in them and they could take on private clients as well to provide genuine competition with private practice and keep it on its toes.

The legal aid system has finally hit the buffers. As the wreckage is cleared away it must be replaced with a system that is equitable, efficient and accessible to all. It is time for us to put into practice the proposals by Lord Irvine, 50 years on albeit, and enact a National Legal Service based on a right to representation.

Yours faithfully,
AUSTIN MITCHELL
(Chair, Campaign for a National Legal Service)
House of Commons,
October 23

From Mr Michael Gould

Sir, As you rightly say in your leading article today, conditional fees have so far largely been confined to personal injury cases, in which it is usually relatively easy to assess the risk involved.

So long as the plaintiff can prove any degree of contributory fault by another party then he will recover some damages and usually be awarded more. If not all, of his costs against that other party. The other party will usually also be insured, making recovery of sums awarded straightforward. Where such factors are not present, such as in insolvency work, the use of conditional fees although possible has been minimal.

Recent research has indicated increasing use of this system in personal injury cases, including many in which legal aid would not have been available; but those cases might well have been taken on by solicitors without conditional fees, in the expectation of success and at the risk of losing and having to seek to recover costs from a resentful client.

Without further research the suspicion must linger that the main effect so far of conditional fees is to allow some personal injury lawyers to recover higher fees at the expense of clients. To justify an extension of these agreements and withdraw legal aid from some areas of work would be best premature and at worst dishonest.

Yours sincerely,
MICHAEL GOULD
(Senior lecturer,
Staffordshire University,
Law School,
Leek Road,
Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire,
October 23.

From the Director of the National Consumer Council

Sir, The legal aid system needs reform, but it does provide access to justice for many people who are unable to afford litigation. To scrap a large part of it in favour of "no win, no fee" agreements is potentially dangerous. We know of no testing whatsoever of the viability of "no win, no fee" agreements from the consumer's perspective. No evidence is available on how well clients understand them or how satisfactory they have proved in practice. Nor do we know whether clients with good cases have been refused help by over-cautious solicitors. It is therefore extremely concerning that the Lord Chancellor proposes to give conditional fees such a key role in our legal system at this stage.

In setting on this desperate measure, the Lord Chancellor appears to have disregarded the potential of Lord Woolf's reforms of civil justice to bring down the costs of legal aid. There is a real danger that the new proposals will deny help to the most vulnerable with just being a panacea for the better-off.

Yours sincerely,
RUTH EVANS,
Director,
National Consumer Council,
20 Grosvenor Gardens, SW1,
October 21.

Letters should carry a daytime telephone number. They may be faxed to 0171-782-5046. e-mail to: letters@the-times.co.uk

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

1 Pennington Street, London E1 9XN Telephone 0171-782 5000

Holbein's trick skull under the lens

From Mr S. C. Gardiner

Sir, The work of an art restorer, his science, his skill, his insight, is totally sublimated to that of the artist whose work he is restoring.

The problem for the viewer of older artwork (all of which has had to undergo some restoration) is how restoration is to be judged: in what way does restoration enlighten us in the present time? Or, is our perception of Holbein's *The Ambassadors* (report, October 20) to be renovated by the particular view taken by an individual restorer? Certainly not.

Martin Wyld's work on the painting was to reveal as much of Holbein's original paintwork that was extant at the time of restoration and to remove all later-added material which overlaid it. He confined his restoration (pinpointing to the areas where the original paint had been lost, flaked off the surface or totally removed in previous cleanings). With modern scientific investigative techniques it is quite possible to determine original paint from later overpainting.

Thus it becomes possible for the gallery viewer to see more Holbein, and less of the 18th and 19th-century accretions, which some people have come to know and love. We can now decide for ourselves from what perspective to view that skull.

Yours faithfully,
S. C. GARDINER
(Art restorer,
23 Hampton Road,
Worcester Park, Surrey,
October 21.

From Professor R. A. Weale

Sir, Your informative report on the problem of the skull did not refer to the theory prevalent years ago, according to which the painting was destined to be placed near the top of a staircase. Consequently those ascending the stairs would see and perceive the skull before they could read the rest of the canvas.

That interpretation appears to conflict with your advice, namely that the skull should be viewed from the top right-hand corner of the detail you

published: it can also be viewed — and recognised — when viewed from the bottom left.

The notion supported by Mr Michael Daley that the skull should be viewed through a glass cylinder is interesting but seems a little far-fetched. I have looked at both the cleaned and the unrestored versions in your article through a cylindrical piece of perspex 2.5 cm in diameter. In either case the skull is to be seen what is significant, however, is that the glass rod has to be held at an appreciable angle from the vertical.

It is unlikely that Holbein would have painted this trick to amuse an audience uncomprehending with the principles of classical optics. It is more probable that the optician, Edgar R. Samuel, who discovered the phenomenon would have realised that anamorphic images are distorted in one direction, and that this can be compensated with a cylindrical lens.

Yours very truly,
ROBERT WEALE,
King's College London,
Cornwall House, Waterloo Road, SE1,
October 21.

From Mr Edgar R. Samuel

Sir, I am delighted that Mr Michael Daley has supported my hypothesis, which I explained in the 1963 *Burlington Magazine*, that Holbein designed the anamorphic skull in *The Ambassadors* to be viewed from in front of the painting through a negative cylindrical lens (of between -25 and -30 dioptres); in other words through the sides of a thick glass tube, probably a flower vase.

Unfortunately I cannot support his view that the restoration of the painting has damaged it. I have viewed the painting since it was restored and the image through a transparent tube is just as good as before the restoration. The painting is now cleaner and clearer than ever. I think that the National Gallery restorers did a great job.

Yours sincerely,
EDGAR R. SAMUEL,
Reform Club, Pall Mall, SW1,
October 20.

Changing childbirth

From Baroness Cumberlege

Sir, Nigella Lawson's experience of childbirth under the "one-to-one" scheme which followed the 1993 government report, *Changing Childbirth*, is marvellous (article, October 21).

Thousands of mothers are experiencing similar midwife-led care, involving the same midwife through pregnancy, birth and aftercare, but some of the units involved are under threat of closure. The reason is, of course, money: the production line is perceived to be cheaper than individual care. In fact the difference in cost is far from proven. What is expensive is the transition from one system to another when both may, for a short while, be operating in parallel.

As a Junior Health Minister I took the very unusual decision to chair the committee which produced *Changing Childbirth* and to use my influence to implement its recommendations. I was and still am convinced that giving women the opportunity to choose how

their baby is born has a profound effect both upon the child's development and family life. If birth is a "happy event" mother and child thrive from the start. If it is a traumatic experience the mother, and probably the child, have to overcome the repercussions of that trauma. Government reports cannot guarantee an easy birth, but they can maximise the chance of a "happy event".

I am well aware that short-term funding crises are also traumatic for those allocating resources, but investing in birth has a proven return in better health for life. The expert committee which produced *Changing Childbirth* was non-party-political and the report gained cross-party support. I do not think it is too much to ask that women be given choice and respect in return for producing and nurturing the next generation.

Yours sincerely,
JULIA CUMBERLEGE
(Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Health, 1992-97),
House of Lords,
October 21.

Bedrock of art

From Sir Michael Maxwell

Sir, I have recently been asked, and given consent, for some boulders to be removed from the shoreline at Port William. These boulders, weighing up to one ton, are to be moved by boat or by helicopter and then fired in a kiln for a considerable period of time.

The result will be displayed in the new Museum of Scotland, which will open in Edinburgh next year. Part of the display will be indoors and will show the effect of heat on rock, and part will be outside to show the effect of water on heated rock. This is intended to be thought-provoking. I am not familiar with the artist or his work but can only admire his achievement in obtaining funding for such a project, especially as Scotland and indeed Edinburgh is not particularly short on rock, volcanic or otherwise, and water.

Perhaps the whole system of how such projects are commissioned and if the public are getting value for money might be reviewed. Dead sheep are cheaper to process and move.

Yours faithfully,
MICHAEL MAXWELL,
Monreith House,
Port William, Galloway,
October 21.

Wheels under fire

From Mr S. C. Moss

Sir, I was rather amused by your report, "Housewife cycles into a speed trap at 43mph" (October 16), but while congratulating Mrs Ros Jones on her obvious improvement in fitness feel it does raise one or two questions.

That she apparently achieved the feat on a road described by the police as "not hilly at all", against the background of the entire ride in which she covered just seven miles in 45 minutes (averaging less than 10mph), is nothing short of amazing. As a first-category racing cyclist, I myself would consider a ride of 43mph noteworthy on my lightweight racer, let alone a mountain bike.

Gypsies from Slovakia

From the Ambassador of the Slovak Republic

Sir, I write to challenge two statements in your report, "Romany refugees head for Britain after Canada closes the door" (October 20; letters, October 22). First you write: "Curfews have been imposed in Slovak villages". There were attempts by some local authorities to impose curfews as long ago as 1993 but, under strong pressure from the national Government and general public, these were lifted in a couple of weeks, so there are no curfews in Slovak villages now.

You go on: "... the Slovak Government has cut child benefit to Romanies...". There have been no such cuts. Slovak law guarantees better benefits for families with more children and Romanies in Slovakia enjoy the same rights as other citizens. Moreover, in 1991 Romanies were granted a status of national minority and their rights are guaranteed by the Slovak Constitution and other laws in compliance with generally valid international standards.

Sincerely yours,
IGOR SLOBODNIK,
Embassy of the Slovak Republic,
25 Kensington Palace Gardens, W8,
October 22.

PC Alan Rowlands may well point to "high" gearing on the mountain bike, but such gearing still requires "high" human effort to produce anything like 40mph on the flat to overcome wind resistance: the current women's world record over 200 metres is 10.8 seconds, just under 42mph.

Is it just possible that the police speed radar in fact picked up another vehicle? Cyclists, after all, are not the biggest of targets. Has the radar gun actually been tested on cyclists?

Yours faithfully,
STEPHEN C. MOSS,
58 Elmhurst Road,
West Moors, Farnham, Dorset.

Weekend Money letters, page 61

Choice of 'saints' for Abbey niches

From Mrs Joanna Malins

Sir, I hope that future generations will find it as unacceptable as I do now, that of the ten saints and martyrs to be commemorated at Westminster Abbey (report, October 18), none is — nor, thanks to 1997 political correctness could be — English.

Following his public beheading by the Japanese in the Gilbert Islands, *The Mission Chronicle* wrote of the Reverend Alfred Sadd, "Missing, believed immortal". Obviously not in Westminster Abbey.

Yours faithfully,
JOANNA MALINS,
3 Langley Avenue, Surbiton, Surrey,
October 19.

From Mr Hazhir Teimourian

Sir, Your report today that a committee at Westminster Abbey has decided to change the building's appearance after 800 years by installing the statues of ten modern people over the Great West Door is almost incredible.

Any such change to a Grade II listed building in the remotest part of the country would cause opposition. Yet we are expected to remain silent in the face of an act of historic vandalism which would, in the process, also destroy the elegant simplicity of the space above that famous door.

No wonder that no British figure has been chosen to be among the commemorated "saints". The committee obviously seeks protection behind the new taboo of multiculturalism.

Yours sincerely,
H. TEIMOURIAN,
107 Pall Mall, SW1,
October 18.

From the Chaplain of St John's School, Leatherhead

Sir, The Archdeacon of York appropriately put forward one of the British martyrs of the 20th century who should have featured in Westminster Abbey's niches.

Father Vivian Redlich (1905-42) remains an inspiration to pupils of his former school, where a chapel is dedicated to his memory and which portrays his missionary work in Papua New Guinea and his execution on Bona Beach in August 1942.

As news of his death reached his friends, Redlich was described as "the missionary we will never forget". Let us hope that, at the next opportunity to remember the saints of our own time, we do not forget this very British priest and martyr who was an inspiration to all who knew him.

Yours faithfully,
MATTHEW LAWSON
(Chaplain, St John's School,
Leatherhead, Surrey,
October 20.

From Rabbi Rachel Montagu

Sir, Does the Church of England really propose to erect a statue at Westminster Abbey to Father Maximilian Kolbe, the Polish priest who died in Auschwitz? His martyr's death does not outweigh his prewar identification with an anti-Semitic journal. I have several times seen it falsely suggested that he died taking a Jew's place in the gas chamber — in fact he replaced another Christian.

It is hard to comprehend why the Church of England should honour this man at the expense of future good relations with the Jewish community, who will be horrified, and rightly so, at this insensitive plan.

Yours faithfully,
RACHEL MONTAGU,
2 Exeter Road, NW2.

From Mr Graham Weeks

Sir, The choice of modern martyrs for Westminster Abbey is indeed questionable. Some are well known and worthy, others little known. One is of dubious Christian character and questionably martyred for Christianity, namely Martin Luther King.

I believe that we should have had some contemporary British martyrs, such as Eric Liddell or missionaries killed in the Congo uprising.

Yours faithfully,
GRAHAM WEEKS,
71 Lee Road, Greenford, Middlesex,
weeks@gdiron.co.uk
October 18.

Favourite firsts

From Professor Emeritus Isabel de Madariaga, FBA

Sir, Surely one of the most splendid firsts in literature (letters, October 18) is:

"Take my camel, dear," said my aunt Dot, as she climbed down from this animal on her return from High Mass.
(Rose Macaulay, *The Towers of Trebizond*, 1956).

Yours truly,
ISABEL DE MADARIAGA,
25 Southwood Lawn Road, N6,
imad@btinternet.com

From Mr Neville Moray

Sir, In the white heat of competition, how could one overlook the opening of Dan Mannix's *Memoirs of a Sword-Swallower* (1951)?

I probably never would have become America's leading fire-eater if Flamingo the Great hadn't happened to explode that night in front of Krinko's Great Combined Carnival Slide Shows.

Yours faithfully,
NEVILLE MORAY,
10a Hampstead Hill Gardens, NW3,
October 21.

Shares fail to hold early gains

TRADING PERIOD: Settlement takes place five business days after the day of trade. Changes are calculated on the previous day's close, but adjustments are made when a stock is ex-dividend. Changes, yields and price/earnings ratios are based on middle prices.

1997	1996	1995	1994	1993	1992	1991	1990	1989	1988	1987	1986	1985	1984	1983	1982	1981	1980	1979	1978	1977	1976	1975	1974	1973	1972	1971	1970	1969	1968	1967	1966	1965	1964	1963	1962	1961	1960	1959	1958	1957	1956	1955	1954	1953	1952	1951	1950	1949	1948	1947	1946	1945	1944	1943	1942	1941	1940	1939	1938	1937	1936	1935	1934	1933	1932	1931	1930	1929	1928	1927	1926	1925	1924	1923	1922	1921	1920	1919	1918	1917	1916	1915	1914	1913	1912	1911	1910	1909	1908	1907	1906	1905	1904	1903	1902	1901	1900	1899	1898	1897	1896	1895	1894	1893	1892	1891	1890	1889	1888	1887	1886	1885	1884	1883	1882	1881	1880	1879	1878	1877	1876	1875	1874	1873	1872	1871	1870	1869	1868	1867	1866	1865	1864	1863	1862	1861	1860	1859	1858	1857	1856	1855	1854	1853	1852	1851	1850	1849	1848	1847	1846	1845	1844	1843	1842	1841	1840	1839	1838	1837	1836	1835	1834	1833	1832	1831	1830	1829	1828	1827	1826	1825	1824	1823	1822	1821	1820	1819	1818	1817	1816	1815	1814	1813	1812	1811	1810	1809	1808	1807	1806	1805	1804	1803	1802	1801	1800	1799	1798	1797	1796	1795	1794	1793	1792	1791	1790	1789	1788	1787	1786	1785	1784	1783	1782	1781	1780	1779	1778	1777	1776	1775	1774	1773	1772	1771	1770	1769	1768	1767	1766	1765	1764	1763	1762	1761	1760	1759	1758	1757	1756	1755	1754	1753	1752	1751	1750	1749	1748	1747	1746	1745	1744	1743	1742	1741	1740	1739	1738	1737	1736	1735	1734	1733	1732	1731	1730	1729	1728	1727	1726	1725	1724	1723	1722	1721	1720	1719	1718	1717	1716	1715	1714	1713	1712	1711	1710	1709	1708	1707	1706	1705	1704	1703	1702	1701	1700	1699	1698	1697	1696	1695	1694	1693	1692	1691	1690	1689	1688	1687	1686	1685	1684	1683	1682	1681	1680	1679	1678	1677	1676	1675	1674	1673	1672	1671	1670	1669	1668	1667	1666	1665	1664	1663	1662	1661	1660	1659	1658	1657	1656	1655	1654	1653	1652	1651	1650	1649	1648	1647	1646	1645	1644	1643	1642	1641	1640	1639	1638	1637	1636	1635	1634	1633	1632	1631	1630	1629	1628	1627	1626	1625	1624	1623	1622	1621	1620	1619	1618	1617	1616	1615	1614	1613	1612	1611	1610	1609	1608	1607	1606	1605	1604	1603	1602	1601	1600	1599	1598	1597	1596	1595	1594	1593	1592	1591	1590	1589	1588	1587	1586	1585	1584	1583	1582	1581	1580	1579	1578	1577	1576	1575	1574	1573	1572	1571	1570	1569	1568	1567	1566	1565	1564	1563	1562	1561	1560	1559	1558	1557	1556	1555	1554	1553	1552	1551	1550	1549	1548	1547	1546	1545	1544	1543	1542	1541	1540	1539	1538	1537	1536	1535	1534	1533	1532	1531	1530	1529	1528	1527	1526	1525	1524	1523	1522	1521	1520	1519	1518	1517	1516	1515	1514	1513	1512	1511	1510	1509	1508	1507	1506	1505	1504	1503	1502	1501	1500	1499	1498	1497	1496	1495	1494	1493	1492	1491	1490	1489	1488	1487	1486	1485	1484	1483	1482	1481	1480	1479	1478	1477	1476	1475	1474	1473	1472	1471	1470	1469	1468	1467	1466	1465	1464	1463	1462	1461	1460	1459	1458	1457	1456	1455	1454	1453	1452	1451	1450	1449	1448	1447	1446	1445	1444	1443	1442	1441	1440	1439	1438	1437	1436	1435	1434	1433	1432	1431	1430	1429	1428	1427	1426	1425	1424	1423	1422	1421	1420	1419	1418	1417	1416	1415	1414	1413	1412	1411	1410	1409	1408	1407	1406	1405	1404	1403	1402	1401	1400	1399	1398	1397	1396	1395	1394	1393	1392	1391	1390	1389	1388	1387	1386	1385	1384	1383	1382	1381	1380	1379	1378	1377	1376	1375	1374	1373	1372	1371	1370	1369	1368	1367	1366	1365	1364	1363	1362	1361	1360	1359	1358	1357	1356	1355	1354	1353	1352	1351	1350	1349	1348	1347	1346	1345	1344	1343	1342	1341	1340	1339	1338	1337	1336	1335	1334	1333	1332	1331	1330	1329	1328	1327	1326	1325	1324	1323	1322	1321	1320	1319	1318	1317	1316	1315	1314	1313	1312	1311	1310	1309	1308	1307	1306	1305	1304	1303	1302	1301	1300	1299	1298	1297	1296	1295	1294	1293	1292	1291	1290	1289	1288	1287	1286	1285	1284	1283	1282	1281	1280	1279	1278	1277	1276	1275	1274	1273	1272	1271	1270	1269	1268	1267	1266	1265	1264	1263	1262	1261	1260	1259	1258	1257	1256	1255	1254	1253	1252	1251	1250	1249	1248	1247	1246	1245	1244	1243	1242	1241	1240	1239	1238	1237	1236	1235	1234	1233	1232	1231	1230	1229	1228	1227	1226	1225	1224	1223	1222	1221	1220	1219	1218	1217	1216	1215	1214	1213	1212	1211	1210	1209	1208	1207	1206	1205	1204	1203	1202	1201	1200	1199	1198	1197	1196	1195	1194	1193	1192	1191	1190	1189	1188	1187	1186	1185	1184	1183	1182	1181	1180	1179	1178	1177	1176	1175	1174	1173	1172	1171	1170	1169	1168	1167	1166	1165	1164	1163	1162	1161	1160	1159	1158	1157	1156	1155	1154	1153	1152	1151	1150	1149	1148	1147	1146	1145	1144	1143	1142	1141	1140	1139	1138	1137	1136	1135	1134	1133	1132	1131	1130	1129	1128	1127	1126	1125	1124	1123	1122	1121	1120	1119	1118	1117	1116	1115	1114	1113	1112	1111	1110	1109	1108	1107	1106	1105	1104	1103	1102	1101	1100	1099	1098	1097	1096	1095	1094	1093	1092	1091	1090	1089	1088	1087	1086	1085	1084	1083	1082	1081	1080	1079	1078	1077	1076	1075	1074	1073	1072	1071	1070	1069	1068	1067	1066	1065	1064	1063	1062	1061	1060	1059	1058	1057	1056	1055	1054	1053	1052	1051	1050	1049	1048	1047	1046	1045	1044	1043	1042	1041	1040	1039	1038	1037	1036	1035	1034	1033	1032	1031	1030	1029	1028	1027	1026	1025	1024	1023	1022	1021	1020	1019	1018	1017	1016	1015	1014	1013	1012	1011	1010	1009	1008	1007	1006	1005	1004	1003	1002	1001	1000	999	998	99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BUSINESS

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BUSINESS EDITOR Patience Wheatcroft

SATURDAY OCTOBER 25 1997

Recovery short-lived as markets fail to shake off jitters

Hong Kong after-shock rolls on

By JANET BUSH
ECONOMICS EDITOR

SHARE prices gyrated wildly yesterday in London and New York as world stock markets continued to be buffeted by the after-shocks of Hong Kong's record fall in share prices on Thursday despite a rebound in the Hang Seng index.

The FTSE 100 index initially surged by 111 points and Wall Street seemed destined to follow, with the Dow Jones industrial average rebounding by more than 91 points at the opening.

However, the recovery was

short-lived as the Dow suddenly started to retreat, dragging European markets off their highs. At mid-session, the Dow was quoted 116.16 points lower at 7,731.61.

The FTSE 100 ended down 21.3 points at 4,970.2, representing a loss over the course of the week of 300 points, or six per cent.

Bob Sample, strategist at NatWest, said: "Three hundred points down looks like a fair comment on the week. Asia continues to be a source of tension. We've had a dead cat bounce in Hong Kong and people seem a bit happier about whether the peg will

hold, but worries over Hong Kong property values won't go away that quickly."

European stock markets had taken comfort as traders woke up to the news that the Hong Kong market had risen nearly 7 per cent, recovering much of the 10 per cent fall of the previous session.

The Hang Seng closed 718.04 points higher at 11,144.34, its second-largest points gain ever. On Thursday it recorded its largest points fall of 1,211.47.

But the recovery was temporary. Wall Street traders cited continuing jitters about the turmoil in Asian markets as

well as nervousness about a speech on the economic outlook by Alan Greenspan, chairman of the US Federal Reserve, who is speaking to the Joint Economic Committee of Congress.

There was some relief in Hong Kong that interest rates, jacked up on Thursday to deter speculation against the Hong Kong dollar, settled back to more normal levels. Overnight money, which jumped to quotes as high as 300 per cent at the height of Thursday's crisis, came back down to around 10 per cent.

There was bargain-hunting on the stock market, largely

from companies that took advantage of the cheap prices to buy back their own shares. Some shareholders took the opportunity of increasing holdings of listed companies.

Despite the rebound yesterday, the Hang Seng still stands 18 per cent lower over the week, and 33 per cent down from its record closing high in August.

Tung Chee-hwa, Hong Kong's chief executive, again expressed confidence that the authorities would be able to beat off speculative attacks against the Hong Kong dollar, pegged for 14 years to the US dollar. He also had some

advice for investors, saying: "The market has fallen but at certain levels it becomes a good buy."

Confidence was patchy, however. China National Aviation Co Ltd said that it is postponing an initial public offering of its shares, saying that it would go ahead when the Hong Kong market had recovered some stability.

While Hong Kong recovered some of its poise, other Asian markets continued to come under pressure. Thailand's stock market lost more than 3 per cent ahead of the appointment of its third finance minister in ten months.

However, the Thai baht, which this week hit a record low, held steady after the announcement that Chavalit Yongchaiyudh, Thailand's Prime Minister, had appointed Kosit Panpiemras, executive director of Bangkok Bank, as finance minister.

In Europe, Frankfurt stocks closed nearly 2 per cent higher, but this was before the opening on Wall Street and the subsequent fall in American share values. In afternoon German trading, stocks were quoted only just in positive territory. In Paris, stocks lost healthy initial gains and closed down a fraction.

BUSINESS TODAY

STOCK MARKET INDICES	
FTSE 100	4970.2 (-21.3)
Nikkei	12,229.5 (-1.2%)
FTSE All share	2261.32 (-5.48)
Nikkei	17383.74 (+212.19)
New York	
Dow Jones	7732.00 (-95.77)
S&P Composite	940.78 (-9.91)
US RATE	
Federal Funds	5 1/4% (5 1/4%)
Long Bond	10 1/2% (10 1/2%)
Yield	5.22% (5.31%)
LONDON MONEY	
3-month interbank	7 1/4% (7 1/4%)
Libor long	11 1/2% (11 1/2%)
Libor (3m)	11 1/2% (11 1/2%)
STERLING	
New York	1.5340* (1.5327)
London	1.5341 (1.5299)
DM	2.9058 (2.8925)
FF	6.7235 (6.6805)
FF	6.4032 (6.3980)
Yen	198.17 (198.43)
£ Index	102.1 (101.7)
DOLLAR	
London	1.7754* (1.7687)
DM	1.4548* (1.4535)
FF	121.83* (121.84)
Yen	105.5 (105.6)
£ Index	105.5 (105.6)
Tokyo close Yen 121.88	
NORTH SEA OIL	
Brent 15-day (Jan)	£30.30 (£30.05)
GOLD	
London close	£315.85 (£323.25)
* denotes midday trading price	

Tecs at centre of allegations of fraud and irregularities

By CHRISTINE BUCKLEY, INDUSTRIAL CORRESPONDENT

TRAINING and Enterprise Councils, which have an annual state-funded budget of £1.25 billion, are at the centre of a wide-ranging inquiry into allegations of fraud and mismanagement, it emerged yesterday.

At least 20 cases of alleged fraud by firms under contract to Tecs in England and Wales and their equivalents in Scotland are being investigated by the Government. Dozens of Tecs are believed to be involved. One training provider is being investigated by police.

Kim Howells, Education and Employment Minister, yesterday said Centec, which serves

central England, could be closed and its duties absorbed by neighbouring Tecs.

An investigation by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) has identified "serious concerns" about the internal audit within the council. If Centec is closed it would be the second Ttec to be shut. The other, South Thames, fell into bankruptcy.

Tecs, which arrange courses through commercial training providers, have been criticised after a string of controversial mis-payments and fraud investigations. Numerous cases have been reported of payments being made for training students who did not exist or for training that was never given to students who did exist.

Yesterday Michael Richard, Permanent Secretary at the DfEE, wrote to the chairmen of all Tecs in England and Wales to set out the Government's "deep concern about errors and irregular payments". He wrote: "I wish to do everything possible to reverse what appears to be a fall in standards of financial control."

Glaxo chief challenge over costs

By PAUL DURMAN

POLITICIANS would be misguided to squeeze the profits of the pharmaceutical companies in an attempt to reduce healthcare costs, Sir Richard Sykes, chairman and chief executive of Glaxo Wellcome, suggested yesterday.

Sir Richard challenged the presumption that the pharmaceutical industry is highly profitable and presents an opportunity for easy public expenditure savings. He said new drugs could cut healthcare costs by reducing the length of time patients remain in hospital. "Medicines represent the best value and the greatest efficiency there is in healthcare," he told a conference in London.

He also ruled out the need for further mega-mergers in the industry. Many commentators believe the fragmented industry will continue to consolidate through deals such as Glaxo's merger with Wellcome and the Sandoz-Ciba merger that created Novartis.

Sir Richard attacked policymakers' attempts to restrict healthcare spending to a given percentage of national output. "Society should want to spend more on healthcare," he said. "Healthcare is a desirable good."

Mr Howells promised "zero tolerance" of payment errors and other irregularities in dealings with companies that provide training services. Irregular payments, which are poor administration and mistaken payments rather than fraud, are this year expected to double to more than £17 million. The fraud investigations could reveal additional losses of several million pounds.

Mr Howells said: "The provision of good quality training lies at the heart of our commitment to lifelong learning and Tecs play a vital role in delivering that commitment. It is all the more important therefore that we have 100 per cent confidence that public money is being spent properly and effectively."

A spokeswoman for the Ttec National Council said: "We have given ministers our assurance that we will work with them to ensure tight financial controls are kept." She said irregular payments had fallen in the six years since direct financial control was removed from the Government.



Sunseeker's new £1.8 million luxury flagship, the 80-ft Manhattan flybridge. The company will be exhibiting in Florida next week

Sunseeker powers towards record year

By GEORGE SIVILL

SUNSEEKER International, the Poole-based builder of luxury powerboats, is streaking towards a record financial year and will next week tackle the lucrative American mar-

ket on its home territory at the Fort Lauderdale boat show. The show opens in Florida on Thursday. Robert Braithwaite, Sunseeker chairman, says that the luxury powerboat market is dominated by the big American players but

the Dorset company still manages to export 99 per cent of its production, one third of it to the American market.

Sunseeker achieved sales of £42 million in the six months to October, and has sufficient orders in hand to reach its

internal target forecast of £76 million for the full year, an increase of 19 per cent on the previous year.

At this level of sales pre-tax profits would reach £4 million, a 5 per cent increase. Sunseeker says it had a suc-

cessful Southampton Boat Show in September and has since sold 44 of its Camargue 44 mid-sized family cruiser at £200,000 each.

Mr Braithwaite expects to maintain production at about 360 craft annually.

Staples issues £1m writ over sacking

By CHRISTINE BUCKLEY, INDUSTRIAL CORRESPONDENT

BRIAN STAPLES, the ousted chief executive of United Utilities, served a £1 million writ on the company yesterday, alleging that he was forced to resign in a showdown with Sir Desmond Pither, the chairman.

He has also begun proceedings for an industrial tribunal hearing.

The writ said that Mr Staples was threatened with dismissal without any warning. "At a meeting attended by Sir Desmond Pither and Mr Howard Jacobs, a partner with the solicitors Slaughter and May, the plaintiff was told he could either resign or be dismissed with immediate effect," it said.

Mr Staples is demanding two years' salary plus other emoluments, which will top £1

million. In the writ he lists numerous benefits associated with his £307,500-a-year job at the multi-utility, including membership of an executive bonus scheme and two share option programmes, the pension scheme, a company BMW and home phone charges. Mr Staples, who was on a rolling two-year contract, had worked there for just over three years.

The sacking of Mr Staples triggered unrest from institutional investors, who demanded that Sir Desmond should step down. Succession plans for the management of United Utilities are due to be unveiled in the next few weeks.

A spokesman for the company said: "We will vigorously defend the actions."

Hambro choice at I&S questioned

By PAUL DURMAN

THE new board of Ivory & Sime Enterprise Capital, the investment trust that has appointed JO Hambro to handle its winding up, was yesterday accused of allowing a director only four hours to seek shareholder support for alternative proposals.

The row has prompted disquiet at one leading institutional investor, which described JO Hambro's appointment as "rather pre-ordained". A senior fund manager said that Hew Balfour was acting conscientiously as an independent director in attempting to listen to shareholders' views.

Mr Balfour resigned his directorship of the trust on Thursday in protest at the way in which the appointment of

JO Hambro was rushed through, without consideration of alternative plans.

Mr Balfour was the only one of the trust's four previous directors to survive a boardroom assault mounted by Colin McLean's Scottish Value Trust, which owns 27 per cent of Enterprise Capital.

Enterprise Capital replaced Mr Balfour with James Hambro, chairman of JO Hambro, simultaneously appointing the firm as manager in place of Ivory & Sime.

Mr Balfour said yesterday that he had asked for two weeks grace to seek shareholder views. He was given only a day, and that had been cut to an "absurd" four hours because of another meeting he had had.

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A WEEK IN THE CITY

It was Big Bang and Black Monday rolled into one. Dealers who began the week sneering at the lack of action - Brown Monday, they dubbed it - were soon sneezing and shivering, as a severe bout of Hong Kong flu swept the globe. By Red Thursday, stock markets had turned a whiter shade of pale. Private investors could only look on in dismay.

Ten years ago, a hurricane was the unforeseen factor that brought the raging bull market of the 1980s crashing to its knees. This week, outside events again proved the trigger for one of the market's busiest times ever. Sets, the new order-driven share trading system, sprang to life on Monday doing

everything that it was not supposed to do. Low liquidity and ever-widening gaps between the bid and offer prices sent the FTSE 100 index see-sawing. Screens turned from blue to red and back again, leaving fund managers gasping with exasperation. The market, down 119 points at one stage, ended the day 60 points lower.

The computer confusion set the scene for what was to follow. Overnight on Tuesday, the Hang Seng index in Hong Kong fell 567 points to 12,403, as the territory became locked in a battle with the currency speculators who have wreaked havoc elsewhere in the region. Overnight interest rates charged to banks jumped to as high

as 300 per cent, as authorities sought to defend the Hong Kong dollar, pegged for the past 14 years to the US dollar.

Overnight on Wednesday, the Hang Seng tumbled 1,211 points to 10,426 - a sharper fall even than in 1987 - sparking panic in London and New York when markets opened on Thursday. The FTSE 100 tumbled 222 points at one stage, slipping below 5,000, while the Dow Jones industrial index dipped nearly 230 points. A suicide in Hong Kong brought chilling echoes of the 1929 Wall Street Crash, although some semblance of calm returned to world markets yesterday. The three UK-quoted shares most exposed to Hong Kong - HSBC, Standard Char-

tered, and Cable & Wireless - were among the worst affected. HSBC was toppled from its perch as the UK's biggest company by market capitalisation, passing the honour to BP, the oil company.

Conflicting signals from the Government over economic and monetary union (EMU) was the third unforeseen factor that fuelled a rerun of October 1987. Reports that the Government was moving towards an early decision to join EMU were played down by Gordon Brown, the Chancellor, leaving puffed-up dealers somewhat deflated. Word that Britain was now unlikely to join a single currency during the lifetime of this Parliament did nothing for shares. Tony

Blair even endured one or two calls during a visit to the London International Financial Futures and Options Exchange (LIFFE). Officials at LIFFE insisted they heard nothing but cheers.

All this left the latest accountability mega-merger rather in the cold. KPMG announced plans to tie the knot with Ernst & Young, creating the world's largest professional services firm, with fees of £11.25 billion. Two former executives of Landhurst Leasing were jailed for taking kickbacks. Prudential Corporation was rebuked over mis-selling of pensions, and RJB Mining saw its shares crash to a record low. It was the sort of week in which one should have stayed in bed.

Euro good for City in any event, says George

By RICHARD MILES
BANKING CORRESPONDENT

EDDIE GEORGE, the Governor of the Bank of England, said yesterday the introduction of the euro would represent an opportunity rather than a threat for the City of London, even if the UK did not join the first wave of economic and monetary union in 1999.

Mr George said the main impact of the euro on financial activity would be to encourage broader and more liquid markets where they are currently fragmented because they are denominated in different European currencies.

"The City of London thrives on liquid markets regardless of the currency — and it will thrive on the euro whether the UK is in or out," he said. "I have no doubt whatever that there will be a vigorous euro-euro market in London, come what may."

"The reality is that the location of financial activity does not depend on the local currency. It will continue to be carried on wherever it can most conveniently, efficiently and profitably be carried on."

Mr George also told delegates at the Royal Institute of International Affairs Conference that he welcomed increasing financial activity in Frankfurt, Paris, Milan or Amsterdam because this would result in increased activity in London. "The City is a major European, not simply a national asset," he said.

Countering criticism that UK financial institutions were unprepared for the introduction of the euro, Mr George said there was growing evidence that banks and insurance companies were now taking the necessary steps to ensure readiness.

The Governor said the banking settlement system that came into operation last spring was being developed to work in the euro. If the UK were to join, the UK sterling system would effectively become a euro system. A parallel system was also under development in case Britain stayed out.



Ferrari launching its F50 model at the Brazil Motor Show last week. The company is expanding into leisurewear in Britain.

Ferrari plans drive into menswear

By SARAH CUNNINGHAM

FERRARI, the Italian sports car firm, hopes to capitalise on its success on this year's Formula One racing circuit by launching a men's leisurewear range at top British department stores.

The range with the Ferrari insignia is being put together by Nive Man Merchandising, part of BMG, which holds the licence for Ferrari merchandise. Nive Man is in talks with a number of department stores, including Selfridges, Harrods and Lillieswhites. It hopes to launch in February.

There is already a range of Ferrari clothing being sold to Formula One fans and through catalogues. The new range will be more in the style of Timberland and Gant. Andrew Walton, marketing manager of Nive Man, said: "Ferrari is also working on plans to launch a chain of stand-alone shops."

OFT pressed for quick action over rogue mortgage lenders

By GAVIN LUMSDEN

NIGEL GRIFFITHS, Minister for Consumer Affairs, has urged John Bridgeman, Director-General of Fair Trading, to act swiftly against rogue mortgage lenders, as it emerged that the OFT was still taking legal advice on guidelines it issued three months ago.

In July Mr Bridgeman threatened to strip lenders and brokers of their consumer credit licences if they continued to exploit vulnerable borrowers with exorbitant interest rates and redemption

penalties. In particular he highlighted the use of dual interest rates, which punish late-paying borrowers with a higher rate of interest, and rule 78, a calculation for redemption penalties that was originally designed for short, unsecured loans and which has been misused by some lenders.

Mr Bridgeman promised to review the situation in September.

This week, addressing the first UK conference for what

are known as sub-prime or non-high street lenders, Geoffrey Horton, the Office of Fair Trading's Director of Consumer Affairs, repeated the pledge to stamp out the practices wherever they were found. In his opinion, he said, loans arranged on these terms were legally unenforceable. He promised revised guidelines would be issued in a few weeks and said that the OFT had written to Mr Griffiths urging him to review the law around rule 78.

However, he added that the OFT was seeking legal advice on whether loans issued before July had to comply with the guidelines.

But Mr Griffiths said he had raised the issue of rule 78 with the OFT in May, July and August and had understood that it would not be used again.

Mr Griffiths said: "The message I want to convey to the OFT, and anyone else, is that I want to see the abuses sorted out. Any legal advice

they are seeking should be done speedily as the public's patience is being exhausted with the abuses of lenders who are charging extortionate rates of interest and are forcing people to lose their homes. I await the Director-General's review with interest."

One legal expert expressed surprise at the OFT's delay. Under Unfair Terms in Consumer Contract legislation, passed in 1994, practices such as dual interest rates and rule 78 are open to legal challenge.

Energy policy review as coal outcry grows

By CHRISTINE BUCKLEY, INDUSTRIAL CORRESPONDENT

THE Cabinet is to examine energy policy amid the growing controversy over the future of the coal industry. A paper on energy is to be looked at by the Economic Policy Committee of the Cabinet in a move which could trigger a wholesale review.

News of the paper, which is thought to be up for discussion in the next few weeks, will increase the calls from coal industry supporters for a radical overhaul of energy. The Government

has been increasingly criticised for washing its hands of coal as the industry faces tough negotiations on new contracts with the generators and as environmental commitments further the dash for gas.

This week shares in RJB, the largest independent coal producer, slumped 25 per cent on fears for the industry's future. A backbench coal pressure group of Labour MPs has been formed as pressure on the Government grows.

RJB to spend £50m on lifting Australian stake

By our industrial correspondent

RJB MINING, the troubled UK coal mining company, is close to spending £50 million to increase its shareholding in CIM, the Australian open-cast mining company.

RJB, whose shares have fallen sharply in London over concern about the prospects for coal mining in Britain, is likely to lift its 12 per cent holding in CIM to nearly 50 per cent to help to fund pit purchases. Yesterday CIM struck an agreement with Exton

to buy one mine, and stakes in two others, in a deal that is expected to be completed next year.

RJB's stake-building plan will be put to CIM shareholders on Thursday, but the UK mining company has an option to buy up to 48.8 per cent of CIM by next June. RJB is currently in the middle of crucial talks with UK electricity generators for new contracts and is thought to be keen to extend its interest in Australia.

Members fail to claim £7m of B&W shares

MORE than £7 million worth of shares are still unclaimed after the Bristol & West Building Society takeover. The society, taken over by the Bank of Ireland in a £600 million deal this summer, said around 23,000 eligible members had not yet claimed their entitlement of 250 preference shares each. They failed to meet the share registration deadline of July 21 but can still claim their shares up to three years after the first day of trading.

The takeover meant that cash windfalls paid directly into the accounts of most of the 1.1 million building society members. But 320,000 more members — mortgage holders and savers with accounts for less than two years — were only eligible for the 250 preference shares. A Bristol & West spokesman said a total of 27,000 people failed to meet the July 21 deadline. Since then the society had been contacted by 4,000 of them. An overall total of more than £1.2 billion in windfall payouts is still unclaimed after other recent building society flotations.

Energy Group expands

THE ENERGY GROUP has entered a three-way deal to buy a coal-fired power station in Turkey for £78 million. The Energy Group, through its subsidiary Peabody, has a 25 per cent stake in the purchase. Its partners are Koc, which has a 50 per cent holding, and NRG which has 25 per cent in the Kangal station in central Turkey. Derek Bonham, chairman of The Energy Group, said: "This project is a further step in the realisation of The Energy Group's strategy to develop as an international, integrated energy company."

Penna earnings rise

PENNA HOLDINGS, the training and recruitment company, reported pre-tax profits of £1.6 million for the six months to September 30, compared with an adjusted £745,000 in the first half of the previous year. Earnings were 10.1p a share, compared with 8.5p. The interim dividend rises to 1.2p a share, from 1p. Reported profits for the first half of 1996 included an exceptional charge of £1.4 million against restructuring, which left a pre-tax loss of £655,000.

Dockers stand firm

NO MORE than three of the 329 dockers involved in the picketing of Mersey Docks and Harbour will accept the £28,000 payoff offered to them yesterday, union officials said. Bobby Morton, one of the shop stewards, said: "We were picketing this morning, and all the people I spoke to said they wouldn't be accepting the offer. This is the fifth in a series of final offers, and we'll stay here for the rest of our lives if we have to." However, Mersey Docks and Harbour insisted: "This is the final offer. After today, matters are closed."

AH Ball losses continue

SHARES in AH Ball, the building and construction group, fell 2p, to 11½p, after Sir James Harvey Watt, the chairman, told shareholders at the annual meeting that the rate of new order intake has been "disappointingly low", despite good volumes of work from the core business and a reduction in overheads. He also told shareholders that margins remain under "severe pressure". Sir James said that the consequence of such trading conditions has been a continuation of losses in the first half of the year that ends in March 1998.

VW refund set at £31m

VOLKSWAGEN, the German auto manufacturer, must pay back DM90.7 million (about £31.2 million) in compensation to end its fight with the European Union over subsidies for an east German factory. The long-running dispute involves illegal subsidies the carmaker received from the east German state of Saxony to help to finance investments at its plants in Mosel and Chemnitz. The issue was complicated when the commission discovered that Volkswagen was exceeding capacity levels agreed with the commission.

Hitachi Credit higher

HITACHI CREDIT (UK), the finance arm of the Japanese trading giant floated on the British stock market in July, raised pre-tax profits by 47 per cent to £3.2 million in the six months to September 30 on sales up 26 per cent to £35.6 million. Earnings rose 25 per cent to 6.6p a share. A maiden interim dividend of 1.7p will be paid. UBS, the house brokers, forecast a full-year pre-tax profit of £7.5 million. Hitachi Credit said that its main markets are both buoyant and dynamic. The shares rose 3p to 152½p yesterday.

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Growing economy opens door to interest rate rise

By JANET BUSH, ECONOMICS EDITOR

THE British economy showed few signs of flagging in the autumn, leaving the door open to another rise in base rates next month.

Gross domestic product grew 1 per cent in the third quarter, exactly the same pace as in the second. However, year-on-year growth rose to 3.9 per cent in the third quarter, from 3.5 per cent in the second, according to preliminary figures from the Office for National Statistics.

The next meeting of the Bank of England's monetary policy committee is on November 6 and it is expected to consider the arguments for

another tightening of monetary policy.

The case is not clear-cut, given a number of slightly weaker forward-looking indicators of economic activity published recently, and also tentative evidence in yesterday's figures that the booming services sector appears to be slowing down a touch. Services, which account for nearly two thirds of the economy, grew an estimated 1 per cent in the third quarter, having increased 1.2 per cent in the previous two.

However, economists cautioned that the services figure may have been depressed by

unusually weak retail sales in September, put down in part to the period of national mourning for Diana, Princess of Wales.

Separate figures yesterday provided a mixed picture on trade. Britain's trade deficit with the rest of the world was £13 million in August, compared with £450 million in July. This was much narrower than expected.

However, the deficit of £779 million with non-European Union countries in September, which compared with a shortfall of £359 million in August, was much wider than expected.

THE SUNDAY TIMES
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For the answers see *Business, tomorrow*.

TOURIST RATES					
	Bank Buys	Bank Sells		Bank Buys	Bank Sells
Australia \$	2.43	2.28	New Zealand \$	2.70	2.54
Austria Sch.	21.48	18.23	Norway Kr	122.8	112.8
Belgium Fr	62.19	58.23	Portugal Esc	306.53	286.50
Canada \$	2.402	2.214	S. Africa R	8.44	7.49
Cyprus Cyp.	0.890	0.820	Spain Ptas	226.70	226.00
Denmark Kr	11.87	10.78	Sweden Kr	15.27	12.17
Finland Mk.	9.26	8.31	Switzerland Fr	2.36	2.24
France Fr	10.52	9.44	Turkey Lira	300.87	286.78
Germany DM	3.07	2.83	USA \$	1.742	1.598
Greece Dr.	493	444			
Hong Kong \$	13.47	12.27			
India Rupee	126	108			
Italy Lira	1.17	1.08			
Japan Yen	6.13	5.40			
Korea Won	3917	2780			
Malaysia M.	213.23	193.70			
Netherlands Gld	1.654	0.915			
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Nail-biting wait for PDFM



COMMENTARY
by our City Editor

By Monday morning many a set of City fingernails will have taken on the manicure modelled by Gordon Brown, the Chancellor, when he switched on the new Stock Exchange electronic order book. With stock markets switched off for the weekend, investors must endure an agonising stay in limbo land before learning whether the long-awaited crash really is upon us. Chewing nails down to the quick would be one of the more moderate responses to the phoney calm.

Yesterday's erratic market movements created total confusion. On Thursday night, with Hong Kong's Hang Seng having plummeted and the FTSE blazoning its biggest points fall in a decade, the trend seemed clear. But clarity clouded rapidly as the Hang Seng regained some of its lost ground and the FTSE started heading back up again. By the end of play, with the FTSE down 21 points, confusion was the predominant reaction.

But there was disappointment, too, in some quarters. At PDFM, the fund manager, Thursday's stock market slump had been greeted with undisguised elation. The firm's much publicised stance that the stock market is hugely over-valued seemed about to be vindicated. Tony Dye and his colleagues retired to their beds happy that night. Friday morning must have been absolutely ghastly for them as the FTSE struggled upwards once

more. Just two weeks ago PDFM had gathered together its clients at a London conference centre to tell them why the firm was sticking to its controversial investment strategy. There was the dash of *mea culpa*, now in vogue with Tory politicians but not Labour spin doctors, and almost inescapable in PDFM's case. "In the last couple of years we have failed to meet your expectations by not meeting the objectives you have set us," admitted Paul Meredith, the fund manager's chairman.

Being significantly underweight in equities has been an expensive strategy in the past few years. Tony Dye steadfastly reiterated his belief in value investment, insisting that equities bought at high prices would disappoint, a stance that logic and experience suggest will be true over time. But the question for PDFM's clients, and those of other similarly inclined houses such as Gartmore, is how long they would have to wait for the market to be proven. Although Mr Dye insisted "it's not a crash that we need, but a return to favour for value", without a crash his funds will still look like losers.

Yesterday evening, opinions

were split as to whether this is crash or mere correction. Ironically, the chances are that if Hong Kong comes into the first category, then New York and London may be helped towards the second by the weight of money that could be transferred out of the former colony.

Whether it be crash or correction, once the tumble has halted there will then be value to be found in some of PDFM's stocks, but by no means all.

Taking revenge on the bank manager

On Tuesday the new super-regulator for the City will be formally introduced to its constituents. There has been much speculation over the name to be accorded to this august body, and at last this is to be revealed, together with some of the details as to how Howard Davies intends it to operate.

For the moment, all but the name must remain in the realm of theory, for the new organisation only leaps into action after the new Banking Act comes into force in the year 2000. This leaves plenty of time for systems to be sorted out and chains of command plotted and given the scope of this super-SIB's remit, the months may all be necessary. But the timescale also brings its own problems, since the existing system of multi-authority regulation has to be fully functional while the new one is knocked into shape. Regulators being a somewhat specialist breed, there is a likely shortage of skills to equip both.

A shortage of willing talent is a potentially limiting factor for the shaping of the Super-SIB board. Many believe this should be weighted in favour of public interest members, but those who already sit on the boards of the existing authorities are firmly out of bounds for the recruiters.

Perhaps the Treasury should be deputising someone to fill an empty seat? Word is that this is unlikely to be the case. After all, regulators sometimes fail to please — just imagine some of those conversations Mrs Liddell, the Economic Secretary, has had with the regulators over their approach to the pensions industry's lackadaisical approach to dealing with the mis-selling debacle. Far preferable, from the Government's point of view, to keep at a distance. "Deniability" remains a sound principle from which to plot a government course.

When it comes to dealing with those it regulates, however, the new authority is keen to press the concept of responsibility.

There is apparently some debate as to the implications of bringing high street banks under the new umbrella. Should bank managers be forced to register individually with the new authority?

This could be particularly relevant since the power to levy fines or disqualify individuals without recourse to the court is almost certain to be included in Super-SIB's armoury.

Disgruntled customers who may be harbouring a grudge against their local bank manager may see in that a tempting route to sweet revenge.

Taking Liberty into a new era

The Stewart Liberty family can claim as their heritage one of the best known brand names in the world. It has, however, been appallingly under-exploited for decades. The family's control over the company stretched well beyond their shareholding and saw Liberty offspring planted in important posts to which they were ill-suited.

Brian Myerson and Julian Treger, the South African investment team who have the same ideas about value investing as PDFM and sometimes appear rather niftier at spotting it, highlighted the languishing attractions of Liberty and their efforts helped to secure board-

room changes. The new team started off well, closing the smaller provincial shops and pulling out of France. But the full potential of the extraordinary Regent Street store, its products and reputation remain untapped. There is an archive of designs, consigned carelessly and uncatalogued to a warehouse by the former directors, which could be the makings of a new fortune for the group.

The share price has been indicating a lack of faith in the new regime's ability to capitalise on the legacy. They could argue that they need longer to make an impression, although that would not tend off a bidder. If the Stewart Liberty family is anxious to regain influence over the company, outside shareholders have every reason to resist. Liberty is a brand with heritage but does not need to step backwards in time to realise its potential.

Learning curve

TRAINING is at the heart of Government strategy but, as Labour suggested in opposition, it does not trust the Training and Enterprise Councils charged to provide it. They are improving from a bad start but there are still too many bureaucratic parasites. Text need to be more accountable, but to business rather than Whitehall. The sooner ministers encourage strong Chambers of Commerce, to take over more Tecs, the better.

Energis deal with MCI gives greater US access

By Raymond Snoddy, Media Editor

ENERGIS, the telecommunications arm of National Grid, has signed an agreement with MCI, the US telephone company, which will enable it to expand its service to the US.

Under the deal Energis, which plans to float in December, will receive international circuits from MCI between the UK and the US. The British company has had an international telecommunications licence since last December and already has capacity in five submarine cables and a relationship with Sprint, the US long-distance operator.

The new agreement with MCI, currently the subject of a three-way bid battle, means that Energis business customers will have the choice of Sprint or MCI pricing pack-

ages to the US. About 20 per cent of Energis's international business is with the US.

When Energis, a specialist in advanced telephony and advanced data services, had to go through BT and Mercury for its US connections, the costs were believed to be about 8p a minute. By putting in its own capacity and linking with US operators, the costs have come down to about 1p.

Mike Grabner, chief executive of Energis, promised recently that he would be "very aggressive" on price.

The pathfinder prospectus for Energis will show that the business generated £97 million in revenues last year and is expected to break even this year before interest, tax and depreciation. About 25 per

cent of the company is expected to be offered. Analysts expect the float to value the company at about £1 billion. Talks are continuing on a deal between Energis and Vodafone, one of the UK's four mobile telecommunications groups.

The takeover battle for MCI is turning nasty as GTE and WorldCom, which both trumped BT's agreed bid, traded the first blows (Oliver August writes).

WorldCom could raise its \$30 billion offer as early as next week, analysts said, while BT is believed to have formed a behind-the-scenes alliance with GTE to outflank WorldCom. The growing antagonism between rival bidders was triggered by WorldCom claims that GTE faced regula-

tory problems. Andrew Lipman, WorldCom's lawyer, said GTE could not close its deal for a further year while WorldCom's bid was done in three months. GTE yesterday strongly rejected these claims.

Analysts said there was a "virtually unanimous expectation" that WorldCom will raise its bid. This could force GTE to consider raising its \$28 billion offer and further increase the value of BT's 20 per cent MCI stake. The bids already make this the biggest takeover in corporate history.

Another factor that could force WorldCom into raising its bid is the current stock market downturn. Its stock swap offer will drop in value if WorldCom's volatile share price falls any further.

F&C lures executive from rival

By Richard Miles, Banking Correspondent

FOREIGN & COLONIAL, the fund management group, has lured a top executive from Credit Suisse Asset Management (CSAM) to succeed James Ogilvy, the outgoing chief executive.

Robert Jenkins, chief operating officer of CSAM, will join Foreign & Colonial at the end of the year when Mr Ogilvy becomes chairman.

Yesterday's announcement of Mr Jenkins' appointment follows the merger in July of Bayerische Hypothek, its German parent, with Vereinshank to form Continental Europe's second-biggest bank. Mr Ogilvy said Foreign & Colonial would develop into the international fund management arm of the combined German bank.

Mackie losses deepen to £5.4m

By Chris Ayres

MACKIE INTERNATIONAL, the troubled Belfast engineering company, yesterday revealed that it had plunged further into the red during the six months to June 30, with pre-tax losses rising from £4.1 million to £5.4 million.

In spite of the losses, Mackie also announced the acquisition of Rice & Co, a metal castings business, for £1.1 million. It said the purchase would help to strengthen its order book.

Mackie is still being threatened with legal action by a company claiming to represent shareholders over its surprise statement last year that losses would be nearly £7 million greater than expected. Over two years shares in Mackie have plunged from nearly 400p to 20p.

The shareholders' company, called Esop's Fables, yesterday

said that it had put forward its case to the Stock Exchange and the Serious Fraud Office. The SFO yesterday confirmed that it had received a complaint but said it had not launched an investigation.

Mackie said its turnover was up 74 per cent from £4.1 million to £7.1 million, with losses per share deepening from 43.4p to 44.6p. No interim dividend will be paid.

Sul Sahota, the company's recently appointed chief executive, said that Mackie had suffered from cash constraints and a lack of customer confidence. He added: "The measures taken to improve trading performance and cashflow, coupled with the commissioning of the new foundry and the related acquisition, enable the board to look forward to a materially improved performance next year."

Bid prompts takeover talk for insurer

By Our City Staff

A MYSTERY buyer emerged with a bid for 10 per cent of National Mutual Holdings, the Australian insurer, igniting speculation of a possible takeover offer worth more than A\$4 billion (£1.7 billion).

BZW Australia, the broker, acted for the buyer, amid suggestions that National Australia Bank, the nation's most profitable bank, was behind the manoeuvre.

The move follows this week's announcement that National Mutual (which is 51 per cent owned by Axa-UAP, the French insurer) and Lend Lease Corp, the Australian financial services group, may merge their insurance and fund management arms. The merger would create a A\$50 billion fund management powerhouse in Australia to rival Australian Mutual Provident.

Delayed orders route Boeing \$696m into red

By Adam Jones

BOEING'S struggle to keep up with unprecedented demand for new aircraft led to a \$696 million (£477 million) loss in its third quarter.

Boeing shocked the market on Wednesday when it revealed that the quarter's performance would be driven into loss by a \$1.6 billion pre-tax charge to sort out production problems, including raw material and parts shortages, and the difficulty of integrating thousands of new "boomtime" employees. The Seattle company was forced to halt 747 and 737 jet production lines earlier this month.

The third-quarter loss, against a \$466 million profit in the same period of 1996, equates to a 72 cents a share deficit. Wall Street analysts were expecting a figure closer to 60 cents, according to a survey yesterday. The stock was trading at \$48.4, down \$2.46 before lunch.

In the third quarter, Boeing recorded sales of \$11.4 billion, compared with \$9 billion in the corresponding 1996 period. It delivered a total of 89 aircraft, compared with 65.

"Unplanned production inefficiencies" associated with the next-generation 737 accounted for \$700 million of the \$1.6 billion exceptional charge, it revealed yesterday. Thomas Basacchi, Boeing's European vice-president, said



A turbulent third quarter equates to 72 cents a share loss

that he hopes the production problems will be fully resolved in mid-1998. Boeing said the third-quarter deficit was also due to higher research and development expenditure, a higher tax rate

and losses from the Douglas Products Division. The merger with McDonnell Douglas, completed on August 1, led to \$99 million expenses in the quarterly figures.

British Steel loses bid to outlaw subsidies

By Christine Buckley, Industrial Correspondent

BRITISH STEEL has lost a bid to outlaw subsidies given to European competitors, after legal action was quashed yesterday by a European Union court.

The company, which started action two years ago against European Commission-backed subsidies to a Spanish company and an Italian manufacturer, may appeal to the European Court of Justice.

British Steel's action had called for the Commission's approval of state aid worth £35 billion to be declared outside the remit of the Steel Aid Code and therefore illegal. Its case was backed by other steelmakers, who took parallel action complaining about subsidies for companies in Germany and Portugal. Those actions were also dismissed.

In the ruling the European Court of First Instance noted that subsidies were meant to rationalise the steel industry and preserve jobs in areas of high unemployment.

British Steel said: "Obviously we regret very much that the court did not support the company's legal interpretation of the treaty... British Steel will decide whether to appeal when it has studied the full text of the judgment."

City police and FBI join forces

By Jon Ashworth

THE Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) put on a public display of force with the City of London Police yesterday in the latest offensive in the fight against international white-collar crime.

The usually camera-shy FBI has teamed up with the City police and Ernst & Young, the accountant, to finance a new video, *A Meeting of Minds*, aimed at alerting businesses to the perils of fraud. The video, produced at a cost of £90,000, is available free to companies and makes for gripping viewing, complete with shady East European and slick-haired City entrepreneurs.

Filmed in London and New York, the video demonstrates the ease with which

computers can be manipulated, potentially spelling disaster for those whose compliance systems prove lacking. William Taylor, the City police commissioner, said: "The main purpose of this hard-hitting video is to demonstrate that fraud is not inevitable, relatively simple steps, conscientiously applied, will make a difference. However, ignore basic precautions and the result can be catastrophic."

Speaking on behalf of the FBI, John E. Guido, legal attaché at the American Embassy in London, said the growth of computer-related crime had increased pressure on law enforcement and business organisations. The video will be distributed through 56 FBI field offices in

America, as well as to the UK business community.

An estimated \$300 billion is lost to fraud every year in the US alone. Ernst & Young says that 75 per cent of companies have suffered at least one fraud in the last five years.

Emerging economies, including those in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, are thought to be particularly at risk from computer fraud. Many of these are supplied with the latest technology, creating opportunities for sophisticated criminals. In addition, problems of corruption in the police and judiciary can impede investigations in these economies.

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Plunge in futures points to further blood-letting

TRADERS in London are bracing themselves for another blood-letting session when financial markets start trading on Monday after the weekend break.

Far from riding out the storm, it looks as if yesterday was just a brief lull for City investors. Last night all eyes were anxiously focused on Wall Street, where investors remained clearly worried about events in the Far East.

The Dow Jones industrial average saw an early 91-point lead wiped out, to be replaced with a 122-point deficit in little more than an hour.

By contrast, there was nothing to suggest anything was amiss at the close of business in London, where the FTSE 100 index ended the week on a reasonably steady note.

It had taken advantage of the overnight rally in the Hang Seng to post an early 111-point rise. But with New York losing ground it was unable to maintain the early momentum and closed 21.3 down at 4,970.2.

Trading proved thin with 691 million shares changing hands as the loss on the week was stretched to 300.9, or 5.7 per cent.

But it was activity down in the futures pit that gave the most cause for concern and suggested that a further sell-off may be on the cards.

The December series plunged 215 points during the last hour of trading, from a peak of 5,150 to a low of 4,935 before rallying to close at 4,952.

This brought to an end a week that the City would sooner forget. It had hoped the tenth anniversary of the Great Crash on Monday would pass off uneventfully.

Neither was it the best week for the London Stock Exchange to introduce the new order-driven computer system, though in retrospect the reluctance of fund managers to use it when the going got tough probably limited the losses among leading shares.

Meanwhile, the Chancellor has promised to clear up the uncertainty over the Government's handling of the single currency issue and will be making a statement in the House of Commons on Monday.

Fund managers must now spend a nervous weekend awaiting the start of trading in the Far East on Sunday night.

HSBC, which has fallen more than 200p this week and lost its mantle as Britain's biggest company, rallied 2p to



Capital Radio DJ Chris Tarrant. Shares in the station held steady at 519p despite a drop in audience reach

£16.12, after £17.30. But there were further losses for Standard Chartered, down 19p at 670p. Cable & Wireless, up 4p at 472p and Inchcape, up 1p at 243p.

NatWest Bank eased 3p to 947p, with speculation rife about the future of its investment banking arm. The gossip is adamant that the

Redland jumped 10p to 347p amid talk of a possible counter-bid for the troubled building supplies group. Lafarge of France has an offer of 320p a share on the table and is determined to win the day. City talk suggests it may try to negotiate agreed terms of up to 370p a share as part of a knockout blow.

Deutsche Morgan Grenfell will make an offer for the business. Barclays closed off the bottom, reducing the deficit to 15p at £15.35. Whippers in the Square Mile maintain the sale of BZW is a race between two suitors, Credit Suisse First Boston and Donaldson Lufkin & Jenrette. The suggestion was met with "no comment" all round.

The power generators closed mixed, still reflecting the Government's decision to

launch an inquiry into electricity pool prices. National Power was 4p better at 492p, while National Grid put on 8p at 285p, but losses were seen in PowerGen, 6p to 672p, Scottish Hydro, 6p to 441p, and Scottish Power, 2p to 430p.

Brokers are continuing to take a healthy view of prospects for Wolsey, the build-

ing it to clients. It closed 20p better at 436p.

Capital Radio held steady at 519p while Scottish Radio fell 7p to 389p. It seems that radio listeners have been abandoning the commercial airwaves in droves during the past three months, with everything from the warm weather to the funeral of Diana, Princess of Wales, blamed. Audience reach at Capital dropped from 30 per cent to 25 per cent during the period. But the company says it has weathered the storm.

The market's appetite for football clubs is clearly waning. Yesterday it was the turn of Leicester City, which began trading at a discount after a placing of shares at 112p. The price dropped to 87p before attracting support. It closed at 93p, a discount of 18p. A couple of weeks ago Nottingham Forest was floated and quickly moved to a discount. It was 1p firmer at 61p last night.

Ultraframe, this week's other newcomer, continued to make headway after a placing by Barclays de Zoete Wedd at 147p. The price added 7p at 171p, stretching the week's lead to 24p.

The speculative buying that lifted Bilton above the 200p level last week has evaporated. The price lost a further 4p to 170p, after briefly touching 168p, on the back of some cautious comments from Merrill Lynch, the broker, which is urging clients to reduce their holdings.

Rokit & Colman was also a dull market, tumbling 25p to 99p after SBC Warburg, the broker, urged clients to "reduce".

GILT-EDGED: Bond prices ended the week with further modest gains, having underperformed other European markets for much of the day. The latest GDP succeeded in fuelling speculation about the need for a rise in interest rates. In the futures pit, the December series of the long gilt closed 1/8 better at £118 1/2, while Treasury 7 per cent 2002 firmed a tick to £101 1/2.

NEW YORK: Wall Street burst made a sharp U-turn by midday as an early rally quickly faded out and technology stocks fell on uncertainty over currency worries in Asia. The midday Dow was 7,520.00, down 95.77 points.

Trading updates

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Standard Chartered 670p -19p
TI Group 583p -38p
RJB Mining 1,840p -65p
Prismair 1,950p -10p
Whitbread Multimedia 35p -15p
Prosean 237p -37p
National Power 402p -99p
Coolson 256p +7p

Hong Kong collapse
Far East casualty
Brokers downgrade
Broker warns on profits
Director buys shares
Shooting: Fish benefits
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MAJOR INDICES

New York (midday):
Dow Jones 7520.00 (-95.77)
S&P Composite 940.76 (-9.91)

Tokyo:
Nikkei Average 17263.74 (-222.14)

Hong Kong:
Hang Seng 11144.34 (-718.09)

Amsterdam:
EEX Index 991.55 (-4.88)

Sydney:
ASX 2561.3 (-53.8)

Frankfurt:
DAX 4020.67 (-73.61)

Singapore:
General 1617.57 (-32.06)

Brussels:
General 13366.66 (-42.11)

Paris:
CAC-40 2849.03 (-7.84)

Zurich:
SIX Gen 1207.10 (-6.48)

London:
FT 30 3316.5 (-10.5)
FTSE 100 4970.2 (-21.3)
FTSE 250 4832.7 (-4.7)
FTSE 200 2010.4 (-7.3)
FTSE 100 Index 100 3629.84 (-4.95)
FTSE All-Share 2361.32 (-4.48)
FTSE Non Financials 2391.26 (-4.42)
FTSE Financials 132.74 (+0.28)
FTSE Govt Sec 100 14.02 (+0.03)
Bulgaria 62.01
Slovakia 33.54
US 1.6338 (+0.0014)
German Mark 2.9362 (+0.0141)
Exchange Index 101.1 (+0.4)
Bank of England official rate 4.75%
ECU 1.7778
LSD 196.53 Sep 1997 Jan 1997-100
SFR 137.4 Sep 1997 Jan 1997-100

Aggreco 161 1/2 -1
Buckland Inv Wts 10
Buckland Inv 17 1/2
Calgorn Demd IT 9
Calgorn Demd Wts 3
Lancashire (ISS) 171
Leicester City 93 1/2
Metals Russia 95 -2
MSB Retail Sys 170 -1
Newsquest (250) 246 -2
Northern Rock 486 +7
Nottingham Forest 61 1/2
Nymed Am N/V 341 1/2 -17
SHL Group 286 1/2
Solihull 192 1/2
Ultraframe 171 1/2 +7
Xaar 112 1/2

Aviva Units n/p 27
Berkeley Group n/p 115 -1 1/2
Consolid Coal n/p (5)
Dawn Tilt Dust n/p 40
Journant T n/p (45)
Lavender n/p (265)
Quicks n/p (115) 12 1/2

RISES:
Swiss Pacific 364p (+41p)
Hutch Whamp 421p (+48p)
Black 275p (+14p)
Jardine 344p (+18p)
Blackie Ltd 430p (+20p)
De La Rue 496p (+20p)
JIB Sports 583p (+25p)
Abbey NI 962p (+23p)
AB Food 600p (+13p)
Deriva Bn Sys 707p (+13p)
Caird Co 849p (+15p)

FALLS:
Schroder Korea 344p (-47p)
Car Group 183p (-5p)
FS Con 333p (-12p)
Vendome 403p (-12p)
Readers 685p (-17p)
Reed Int 576p (-14p)
Lloyds TSB 723p (-17p)
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BAA 552p (-13p)
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Closing Prices Page 28

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AB Food 600p (+13p)
Deriva Bn Sys 707p (+13p)
Caird Co 849p (+15p)

FALLS:
Schroder Korea 344p (-47p)
Car Group 183p (-5p)
FS Con 333p (-12p)
Vendome 403p (-12p)
Readers 685p (-17p)
Reed Int 576p (-14p)
Lloyds TSB 723p (-17p)
Sed 726p (-13p)
Ead 585p (-13p)
BAA 552p (-13p)
Hays 727p (-11p)

Closing Prices Page 28

Aggreco 161 1/2 -1
Buckland Inv Wts 10
Buckland Inv 17 1/2
Calgorn Demd IT 9
Calgorn Demd Wts 3
Lancashire (ISS) 171
Leicester City 93 1/2
Metals Russia 95 -2
MSB Retail Sys 170 -1
Newsquest (250) 246 -2
Northern Rock 486 +7
Nottingham Forest 61 1/2
Nymed Am N/V 341 1/2 -17
SHL Group 286 1/2
Solihull 192 1/2
Ultraframe 171 1/2 +7
Xaar 112 1/2

Aviva Units n/p 27
Berkeley Group n/p 115 -1 1/2
Consolid Coal n/p (5)
Dawn Tilt Dust n/p 40
Journant T n/p (45)
Lavender n/p (265)
Quicks n/p (115) 12 1/2

RISES:
Swiss Pacific 364p (+41p)
Hutch Whamp 421p (+48p)
Black 275p (+14p)
Jardine 344p (+18p)
Blackie Ltd 430p (+20p)
De La Rue 496p (+20p)
JIB Sports 583p (+25p)
Abbey NI 962p (+23p)
AB Food 600p (+13p)
Deriva Bn Sys 707p (+13p)
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Hays 727p (-11p)

Closing Prices Page 28

TEMPUS

The generation game

INDUSTRIAL electricity consumers have been whingeing about the price they pay for juice from the pool. They are about as convincing as a currency trader complaining because he lost money betting against the dollar.

Apparently, big electricity users are annoyed about huge spikes in electricity prices at times of peak use. The concern about the cost of electricity has led some companies to build their own generators, but John Battle, the Energy Minister, has launched a wholesale review of the operation of the pool, the body into which generators bid their capacity on a daily basis.

Few people understand the arcane workings of the pool and most of the generators have agreed contracts with customers outside the pool, which sets its price on the basis of

marginal bids made by generators. Such a system is bound to create volatility as a result of weather, breakdowns at particular generators and, famously, French strikes. Industrial users suspect gamesmanship by generators pitching their bids in a way that secures high prices, yet this market is becoming more, not less, crowded — hardly ripe for a cartel.

Electricity users have enjoyed huge cuts in prices since privatisation — down 24 to 30 per cent in the last seven years. That is as it should be, but it is unclear whether this review will secure better prices. In fact the opposite could happen: what power company is likely to build new generating capacity with a pricing review looming? The outcome will be unknown for some three years. High-yielding stocks make good defensive investments and in this market the generators look a very sound buy.

UNDER THE SKIN OF SPORT

BIG GAME HUNTER

Matt Dawson is a Lion back in favour
PAGE 40

DANNY BAKER

Kick rugby off the park
PAGE 35

BRIAN GLANVILLE

The chilling facts of Chelsea's Arctic trip
PAGE 36

WEEKEND MONEY

Studio flats: are they now out of fashion?
PAGES 51-64

go

Peking to Paris: the end of the road?
PAGES 45-49

THE TIMES SATURDAY SPORT

OCTOBER 25 1997

VILLENEUVE AND SCHUMACHER HAVE THEIR EYES ON THE PRIZE



Villeneuve, left, and Schumacher may be poles apart in temperament and upbringing, but this weekend they are united by ambition: the desire to secure the Formula One crown. Photographs: Allsport

TWO men, one title: the ultimate attraction of opposites. The duel for the Formula One world championship pitches a privileged prep school dropout against the assiduous son of a factory worker. They are as fundamentally different as their favourite singers, Iggy Pop and Phil Collins.

The only thing that unites Jacques Villeneuve and Michael Schumacher is their unrelenting ambition, which may well consume them tomorrow when a global odyssey ends on the dusty, bumpy Circuito de Jerez. Any weakness, human or technological, will be exposed before a television audience in excess of 350 million. Schumacher has no sense of history unless he makes it. Villeneuve lives with the ghost of his father, Gilles, an icon who died in the wreckage of a racing car. Even their teams are at either end of the emotional spectrum. Ferrari are fuelled by *La Passione*, pure instinct. Williams, who

World title resting in lap of the gods

Michael Calvin assesses the rivals ready to drive on the edge in Jerez

have won the constructors' title for a record ninth time, are a watchword for clinical detachment. "I wouldn't be able to win races in a bad car," Schumacher argued, but his intrinsic superiority may be worthless, because the £80 million that Ferrari have invested in the pursuit of their first world title for a generation cannot buy invulnerability. One of the few things he lacks is a sportsman's birthright, the privilege of being able to decide his own destiny. Villeneuve has the burden of an inescapable advantage: the

best car. His impulsive nature, illustrated yesterday by a lurid slide into a gravel trap during free practice for the European Grand Prix, is ill-suited to the demands of overcoming the deficit of a single point in the last race of an extended season.

"Neither of them will sleep very well this weekend, but I wouldn't want to be in Jacques's shoes," Damon Hill,

whose anticlimactic year as world champion is about to end, said. "He is under an enormous amount of pressure, from himself as much as anything, because, deep down, he knows he has frittered away his advantage."

To an extent, Williams have done their bit by winning the constructors' championship. Now it's down to him. It's his problem. On a purely

personal level I'd like to see him win, but you have to say that Michael has done exceptionally well. If he wins, it will be down to his brilliance. If Jacques wins, everyone will say that's what he should have done anyway."

It is time for the Spice Boy to prove his substance. Craig Pollock, Villeneuve's manager, may insist that "Jacques goes into another mode when there is pressure," but his is an increasingly distant voice. Villeneuve's ability is beyond question, but many, even within his own team, have been alienated by his attitude.

Schumacher, by contrast, is regarded with a sense of awe. Gerhard Berger summed it up best. "It doesn't matter whether Michael wins the title this weekend," he said. "He's unbelievable. For his age and experience he's already there among the greats. With his focus, his fitness and his car control, the guy is just complete."

The German is isolated by his talent — "basically you have to ignore people," he says — but somehow retains a populist's touch. As bizarre as it may seem, given the universal appreciation of his ability to maintain a nervous car on the edge of adhesion, he is the underdog. "It does get the best out of me if I am really challenged," he said, but, like Ayrton Senna before him, he excels because of the compelling demands he places on others. As Ross Brawn, the Ferrari technical director, said: "When the pressure is on, Michael becomes that bit sharper and more acute. He

tries that little bit harder to ensure we do not make any errors."

Joan Villadelprat, the Benetton team manager, was, with Brawn, a key element in Schumacher's two previous world title wins. "The pressure does get to him a little bit, because he is human, but he doesn't show it in his driving," he said. "In fact, the more pressure you put on him, the more he concentrates. If you know him you can tell when he's worried. He puts pressure on the team. It is all we must

Continued on page 34

Please tell our wandering boy to stay put

Gascoigne let loose in Premiership would be worrying for England

HOW very unsettling to learn that Paul Gascoigne might be coming back to English football. It was like that awful, inevitable moment in Hammer horror films when someone enters, staggering with wild eyes and tattered lab-coat and reports "It's on the loose!" Suddenly a lot of things have to be rethought, very quickly. Alarms are sounded, drawbridges closed with a rattle of chains, above all, complacency is roundly cursed. You really believed Rangers would be the end of the Paul Gascoigne phenom-

non? You fools. He bursts such fetters with a single shrug.

The thing is, for a rather nervous England football fan like me, it's been lovely having Gazza play in Scotland. It's been safe. We've been able to wave cheerful yoo-hoos across the border to that big happy fish in his wee pond, with the double pleasure of enjoying his reflected glory of goals, goals, goals, and reserving the right to disown him at the very first sign of trouble. Distance has certainly lent enchantment where Gascoigne is concerned. Every time he turns up for international duty, we are pleased to see him, applaud his renewed dedication to fitness, take a genuine interest in his hair, and burst into tears at the superlative quality of his shimmies.

But does that mean we necessarily want him back? Well, no. Because the tragedy is, when you get Gazza, you get all of him. It is no accident that Gascoigne's pigeon-chested body divides clearly into two ill-proportioned parts, something like the house resting on chicken-legs in Russian folk tales. With Gazza, there's the rather splendid half controlled by his legs (the good part), and then there's the big, grinning, buffoon half controlled by his brain. He's got a foot like a brain, and a brain like a foot, poor beggar.

Nobody expects dazzling intellectuality from footballers; Graeme Le Saux is known as the Jean-Paul Sartre of British football because he collects antiques. But a man who'd be picked out of a Dennis-the-



An emotional Gascoigne hugs Wright in relief after the final whistle in Rome

Menace identity parade — well, somehow you draw the line.

Will he come, or not? Is the *Night of the Living Gazza* set to commence at Villa Park? Is a tremendous football in the distance already loosening the brickwork of the Trinity Road stand? Rumours now suggest not. But when you think about it, a transfer to Aston Villa would give Gascoigne automatic top place as Villa's Most Interesting Player (the petulant Stan Collymore disqualifies himself).

But on the debit side, what if Premiership football wears him out before the World Cup? Over-excitement is surely something to protect Gazza from, especially in his advancing years. For the World Cup, you want him relaxed and confident, not worn to an agonised frazzle.

So on balance, stay in Scotland, Gazza. And if you are understandably miffed at Rangers' ungrateful willingness to sell you, find mature forgiveness in your heart. Stay put and stay happy. Turn off the alarms, and re-open the portcullis. Back on the slab with you, Gazza, and refasten those straps. That way, you really do yourself and everyone a favour.

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Villeneuve caught in the grip of scarlet fever

ROB HUGHES



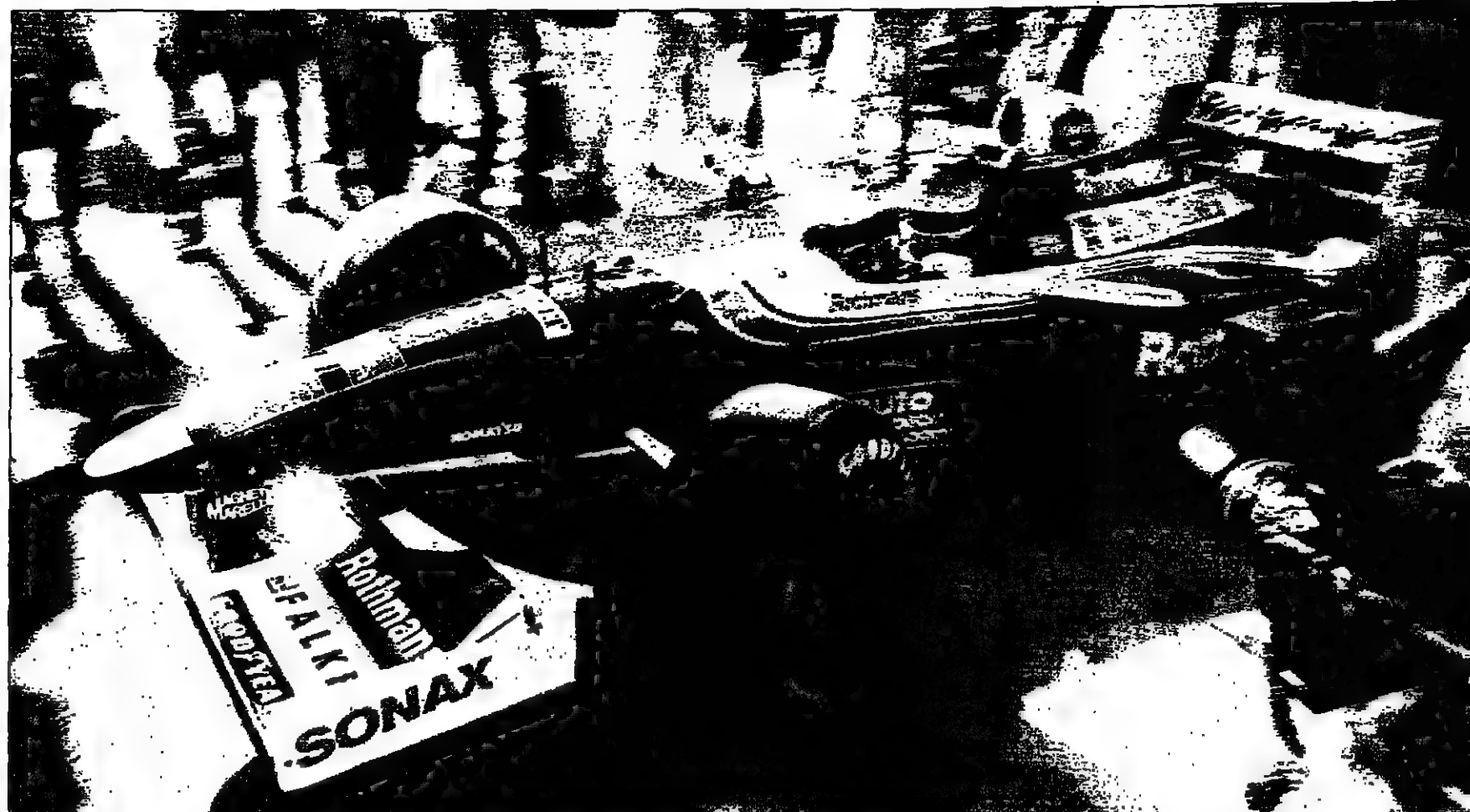
In Jerez

Machiavelli lives and breathes. His spirit stalks the hot and dusty pit lane of Jerez de la Frontera in the guise of conspirators who claim that the European Grand Prix tomorrow is a done deal, a collaboration to smooth Ferrari's path to its first Formula One drivers' title for 18 years.

No one has told Jacques Villeneuve. If and when the rumours reach him, as perhaps they are designed to do, to tighten the tension around his bleached temples, he is entitled to observe that conspiracy in motor racing can blow out in a puff of smoke. Yet the little French-Canadian is in the way of Formula One business. From Bernie Ecclestone and Max Mosley down, those who run the billion-dollar enterprise do not deny that the Ferrari legend is life blood to the turnover. Ferrari is more than a motor; it is an emotion, a spirit, a soul machine that quickens the pulse on a global scale. Tomorrow, when the race for the first corner is on, the intensity will be felt in the town square of Maranello, near Modena, where Ferrari was conceived 50 years ago, and where cars are still designed and dreamt.

As the green light goes, the cars will be catapulted out of stillness... past the trackside hospital, then 400 yards into the first hairpin, unimaginatively called Curva Expo 92. Whoever is first into that will be devilishly hard to pass on a tight and bumpy circuit of high-speed corners. The heat will rub away at the tyres, the unrelenting G-forces will erode the concentration of the drivers. In Maranello, it will be difficult to move and to breathe, also.

'Ferrari is an emotion that quickens the pulse'



Villeneuve leaves the Williams garage for the first free practice at Jerez yesterday, knowing sentiment will demand a Ferrari win tomorrow. Photograph: Dusan Vranic

Giancarlo Bertacchini, the mayor of this town of 15,000 people, has ordered a giant outdoor screen, plentiful bottles of Lambrusco — "Rosso di Maranello". He also plans, perhaps presumptuously, to toll the bells of the town for three days — in the morning when the workers go into the factory, and in the evening when they leave. Unsurprisingly, there are Ferrari owners and aficionados heading by the thousand to that town in mid-Italy.

With due respect to Williams, already the constructors' champions again, nothing quite like that will happen in Grove, Oxfordshire, where the British car is made. It is not that Frank Williams, the team owner, is cold-blooded. Certainly not that Villeneuve hungers less for the crown than Michael Schumacher. The Italian psyche pulsates through two sports: England has already put a tremor into the heart of Italian football and

now, though Williams is powered by a Renault engine, there is fear that British engineering can deny the scarlet Ferrari.

You see, we are caught up in Enzo Ferrari's passion play. His cars have won 113 grands prix but

purported never to be the businessman, but he knew that victory was to the cunning. And surely Ferrari knew how rumour-mongering gives an extra frisson to the game. The Formula One bosses actively encourage conspiracy

talk, the spicier the better. Consequently, we are told about the blocking manoeuvres, the possibility of man pushing man and machine beyond the limits. This applies not only to the main rivals, Schumacher and Villeneuve, but

also to their team-mates, Eddie Irvine and Heinz-Harald Frentzen. Indeed, a fifth name, that of Ralf Schumacher, who owes his brother plenty after their collision at Nürburgring, is brought into play.

The fear is, dived with deadlines. The race might come down to the nerve in Villeneuve, because no one questions Michael Schumacher's control of mind and matter — he is, after all, fourth in the list of all-time grand-prix winners. Villeneuve, of course, does not lack heart. Indeed, some accuse him of having too much, bordering on addiction to danger.

If the race goes the full distance, there will be 69 laps on a circuit that demands 27 gear changes per lap. That, you would think, is enough of an adrenalin surge, enough of a demand on the mind and body of each protagonist without fanning the flames of speculation. The stress is on mental

DETAILS FROM JEREZ

PRACTICE TIMES: 1, O. Panis (Fr, Prost-Mugen-Honda) 1min 22.73sec; 2, D. Hill (GB, Arrows-Honda) 1:23.05; 3, J. Villeneuve (Can, Williams-Ford) 1:23.22; 4, R. Barrichello (Br, Stewart-Ford) 1:23.54; 5, M. Hakkinen (Fin, McLaren-Mercedes) 1:23.54; 6, M. Frentzen (Ger, Williams-Ford) 1:23.74; 7, J. Alais (Fr, Benetton-Ford) 1:23.74; 8, D. Coulthard (GB, McLaren-Mercedes) 1:23.74; 9, M. Schumacher (Ger, Jordan-Peugeot) 1:23.78; 10, R. Schumacher (Ger, Jordan-Peugeot) 1:23.78; 11, J. Magnussen (Den, Stewart-Ford) 1:23.82; 12, S. Burti (It, Benetton-Ford) 1:23.82; 13, G. Berger (Austria, Benetton-Ford) 1:23.82; 14, G. Rashedi (UAE, Jordan-Peugeot) 1:24.25; 15, U. Kunz (Ger, Benetton-Ford) 1:24.32; 16, J. Herbert (GB, Sauber-Peterson) 1:24.50; 17, S. Nakano (Jpn, Prost-Mugen-Honda) 1:24.75; 18, P. Ortiz (Arg, Arrows-Yamaha) 1:24.76; 19, M. Salo (Fin, Tyrrell-Ford) 1:25.05; 20, N. Fontana (Arg, Sauber-Peterson) 1:25.13; 21, J. Verstappen (Hol, Tyrrell-Ford) 1:25.27; 22, T. Marques (Br, Minardi-Hart) 1:26.81.

CHAMPIONSHIP POSITIONS (after 16 races): Drivers: 1, M. Schumacher 76pts; Villeneuve 77; Frentzen 41; 4, Alais 38; Coulthard 30; 5, Burti 24; 7, Irvine 22; 8, Barrichello 20; 9, Hakkinen 17; 10, Panis 16; 11, Herbert 14; 12, R. Schumacher 13; 13, Hill 14; 14, Benetton 13; 15, Wurz 12; 16, N. Lami 11; Constructors: 1, Williams-Ford 120pts; 2, Prost-Mugen-Honda 120; 3, Benetton-Ford 119; 4, McLaren-Mercedes 118; 5, Jordan-Peugeot 33; 6, Prost-Mugen-Honda 21; 7, Sauber-Peterson 15; 8, Arrows-Yamaha 9; 9, Stewart-Ford 8; 10, Tyrrell 2.

GRAND PRIX TO COME: Tomorrow: European (Jerez).

as much as man, and no one pretends that if Schumacher was in the Williams the race would be no contest. Williams are still, unarguably, the master engineers, though Ferrari is an enlarging image in the driver's mirrors.

The rivals are feigning nonchalance, pretending that they will find tomorrow fun, intriguing, but nothing outside their experience. Walking around Jerez are Jody Scheckter and Niki Lauda, the previous two Ferrari drivers to taste the unique thrill, the spiritual sensation of winning in that very special vehicle. Neither Scheckter nor Lauda, though, can truly know what it is to be a racer as consummate as Schumacher. They were racers of their own time, and time, the business and the sport have moved on at alarming speeds of progression. However, one wonderful motor racer, imperious in the Fifties, did leave a legacy of words that all those on the track in practice today and in the race tomorrow should heed.

I am thinking of Juan Manuel Fangio, the world champion in a Ferrari in 1956, who said: "The art of motor racing is to steer a line as close to the edge of death as possible — but always to err on the side of life."

HOW THE TITLE WILL BE DECIDED

Michael Schumacher 78pts

Jacques Villeneuve 77pts

With one point between the two drivers the world championship will go to whoever finishes in front of the other in Jerez tomorrow. If Schumacher fails to finish or finishes outside the top six, Villeneuve must finish at least sixth to earn the point that will put him level. Villeneuve would then be champion for the first time because he has scored more victories during the season (seven to Schumacher's five). Under Formula One's scoring system, a win is worth 10 points, second place 6, third 4, fourth 3, fifth 2 and sixth 1. Schumacher has already won two titles, in 1994 and 1995.

WHERE THEY SCORED THEIR POINTS

WINNER	Points	Locations
Schumacher	5	Monaco, Canada, France, Belgium, Japan
Villeneuve	2	Australia, San Marino, Germany
Schumacher	2	Spain, Hungary
Villeneuve	1	Brazil
Schumacher	2	Italy, Austria
Villeneuve	3	Argentina, Britain, Luxembourg

DNFs: Did not finish

WHEN TO WATCH ON TELEVISION

Today: ITV 11.50am-1.20pm (qualifying)
Tomorrow: ITV 12.30pm-3.30pm (race)

A TIMES NEWSPAPERS COMPETITION

One race to go to decide £25,000 top prize

With up to 600 bonus points available in tomorrow's European Grand Prix for the managers who correctly predict the first three drivers to cross the finishing line, the race for our £25,000 top prize is still wide open. Printed below are the results of the Japanese Grand Prix which have been adjusted to take account of Jacques Villeneuve's disqualification in Japan. These results differ from those published last Friday. Heading our leaderboard is A Bradley of Godalming, Surrey. His team, Slickhead 3, scored 649 points at Suzuka to take his cumulative score in the competition to 11,866 points. Hot on his tail in second position is I Dowty of Reigate, Surrey. His team, Dow Jones 2, scored 625 points in Japan

to take his total to 11,854 in the competition. P Wright of Lytham St Anne's wins a trip for two to next year's British GP. His team, Blunderbus, scored 805 points in Japan. S Leason of Uxotexeter (It's the Pits, 802 points) wins a Sony PlayStation and CD-Rom game. **THE PRIZES:** The manager with the best team score after tomorrow's Grand Prix will win the first prize of £25,000 courtesy of our sponsor Marlboro World Championship team. Prizes of £10,000 and £5,000 will go to two runners-up. Race prizes are a trip for two to next year's British GP and a Sony PlayStation, and CD-Rom game. **CHECK YOUR SCORE** by calling 0891 884 648 (+44 990 100 348 ex UK).



OUR LEADERBOARD AFTER THE JAPANESE GRAND PRIX

POS	TEAM NAME	MANAGER NAME	POINTS
1	Slickhead 3	A Bradley	11866
2	Dow Jones 2	I Dowty	11854
3	Wood Racing	M Wood	11759
4	Raith Rovers F C	D Shepherd	11759
5	Team U D O	P Wallley	11631
6	Mosulve	J Madden	11627
7	Forza 27	M Joannides	11596
8	Valley Crews	S Rattle	11571
9	Watts Racing F1	P Wight	11557
10	No Hoppers	P Zevlatbedini	11553
11	Sly'em	Ms A Sligh	11536
12	Sky Stars	A McPhee	11496
13	Fantastic Racing	R Crosby	11496
14	Diamond	M Parsons	11496
15	Burnidge Racing	I Burnidge	11496
16	Grow 97	P McKinney	11496
17	Semastallion 5	G Curry	11496
18	Bel A Ton	M Dymond	11480
19	The Very Real Club	J Heggway	11482
20	Red Menace 1	M Power	11482
21	Matt's Maniacs	M Johnson	11482
22	Thompson Terrors	A Thompson	11482
23	Rufus II	S Daniels	11482
24	Blings	R Mullin	11482
25	Mark's Wizards	H Evans	11482
26	Stave G1	S Georgiades	11482
27	Adam's Autos	C Adams	11482
28	Hams Rule Racers	N Roberts	11482
29	GFO	A Gent	11482
30	Georgie	M Clark	11482
31	Shuc Racing	N Trutt	11482

MAKE 3 SELECTIONS FROM EACH OF THESE FOUR GROUPS

The first column of figures, in light type after the names below, shows the revised Fantasy Formula One race scores for the Japanese GP. The second column shows the total points in the competition so far.

DRIVERS GROUP A			
01 D Hill	101 1213	07 M Hakkinen	107 1188
02 M Schumacher	146 1862	08 D Coulthard	83 1345
03 J Villeneuve	0 1638	09 R Barrichello	12 792
04 E Irvine	118 1359	10 H-H Frentzen	147 1557
05 J Alais	106 1739	11 J Herbert	104 1420
06 G Berger	102 1477	12 M Salo	36 1219

DRIVERS GROUP B			
13 O Panis	44 1656	19 G Franchella	102 1482
14 J Verstappen	101 1060	20 S Nakano	25 1040
15 U Katayama	7 861	21 G Morbidelli	0 1387
16 P Diniz	95 960	22 T Marques	44 872
17 R Rosset	0 0	23 J Magnussen	7 769
18 R Schumacher	102 1124	24 V Sospiri	0 0

CONSTRUCTORS GROUP C		CONSTRUCTORS GROUP D	
25 Williams	25 290	31 Arrows	16 4
26 Ferrari	30 250	32 Sauber	11 190
27 McLaren	13 122	33 Tyrrell	4 2
28 Benetton	22 254	34 Minardi	-20 8
29 Jordan	20 147	35 Stewart	-20 -157
30 Prost	-20 114	36 Lola	0 0

* Olivier Panis replaces Jarno Trulli in the Prost team. Tasso Marques replaces Trulli at Minardi and G. Sauber's Gianni Morbidelli, who originally replaced Nicola Larini, replaces Frentzen.

WINNERS AND FULL RESULTS WILL APPEAR NEXT SATURDAY

0891 calls cost 50p per minute (standard tariffs apply to +44 990 calls).

CHANGING TIMES

World title rivals go head to head

Continued from page 33

do this, we must do that. But, ultimately, he is confident he can do his job. Ninth place in free practice, six positions behind Villeneuve, is no real gauge of either man's prospects. Such sessions are mere shadow boxing, a search for the right set-up for a twisty circuit set in the parched, sherry-producing plains of Andalusia. The race will take real shape this afternoon in the qualifying session. Villeneuve romanticises the challenge of a one-off lap that allows him close to the fabled "edge", that invisible barrier between bravery and foolishness that preoccupies all racing drivers. Schumacher is

more calculating but equally committed. "It's going to be a question of who keeps his head," Hill, second quickest yesterday, said. "They will have eyes only for each other and the one who doesn't get distracted will win. That's difficult, because of the chaos that swirls around you in this situation, but it's a critical part of the job of being a racing driver. "Jacques doesn't take advice terribly easily and he has already had one trip to the gravel trap. I still feel a Williams is more competitive here than a Ferrari, but it is not as simple as that. So many other factors come into play. "A one-off race for the title is

the most exciting, intriguing and challenging aspect of our sport. It is the ultimate test. Can you handle a showdown for the championship? Can you pull something out of yourself which is better than anything you have ever produced? You don't know until you have to." Ill-fortune, such as Nigel Mansell's exploding tyre in 1986, is part of the folklore of Formula One, but the inevitable speculation that the title could be decided in an accident has the strength of precedent. Alain Prost, Senna and Schumacher have all become champions in controversial circumstances in the past ten years.

Hill, Schumacher's victim in Adelaide in 1994, smiled ruefully at the memory of personal injustice, but preferred to illustrate his point with his late father Graham's failure in 1964. He span out under assault by Lorenzo Bandini, whose Ferrari teammate, John Surtees, went on to win the title. "Something always seems to happen when it comes down to the wire," Hill said. "It seems to be too much of a temptation. That's sad because I still like to think of this as a sport. It should be about being the best, out-driving all others, not about being sufficiently bullish, or brash, to take the guy out."

BOXING

Schwer at the crossroads of his career

FROM SRIKUMAR SEN BOXING CORRESPONDENT IN ZARAGOZA

BILLY SCHWER should find out here tonight, when he challenges Oscar Garcia, of Spain, for the European title. What his prospects are of coming back into contention for the world championship. The former British and Commonwealth lightweight champion fell from grace after his surprising defeat by David Teteh, of Ghana, in 1995. Schwer fought his way back to earn European Boxing Union nomination as challenger and if he lifts the title here, he will become one of the leading world contenders. Defeat could cause him concern about his career. Schwer's failure to impress against Alan Temple, of Hartlepool, and Jean Moulin, of France, last year caused many to believe that his hard contests had started taking their toll. But his father, Billy Schwer Sr, said yesterday that those two performances should be put down to lack of motivation caused by domestic and dietary worries. Schwer is now back to his old self and his manager, Mickey Duff, believes that he will stop Garcia in the middle rounds.

SAILING

Defiant Dickson still harbours victory hope

FROM EDWARD GORMAN IN CAPE TOWN

CHRIS DICKSON, of New Zealand, the pre-race favourite, finally brought *Toshiba* into Cape Town in sixth position yesterday, three days after the first-leg winner, Paul Cayard, on *El Langue*. Despite this unexpectedly poor start, though, Dickson seemed confident about his overall chances in the Whitbread Round the World Race. "It is by no means a disaster," he said after his boat had powered her way to the finish line under spinnaker on a glorious morning. The key moment, he added, had been four weeks ago when the fleet leaders were becalmed off Cape Finisterre. "On day four we had *Silk Cut*, *Merit Cup* and *Innovation* Kvaerner on the radar and we were all on the favoured starboard tack," he said. "They got the new breeze before us and held on to it for two hours, then stayed on the back of it for two days, while we had only two minutes of it." Dickson said he and his frustrated crew finally got going about 36 hours later, long after the boats to the west had left the bay. From then on the crew managed by Team Dennis Conner was trapped in a running order always

GOLF

Cold Waugh too fierce for Prosser

SHANI WAUGH, of Australia, completed a flawless opening round of 67, four under par, in a biting cold wind to lead the field in the 54-hole Air France women's Open at Deauville in France yesterday. Waugh finished the day one stroke ahead of Sally Prosser, of Britain. Alison Nicholas, the US Open champion, and Marie-Laure de Lorenzi, who are attempting to overtake Helen Alfredsson, of Sweden, for the No 1 place in Europe, returned rounds of 73. It was a relieved Waugh who arrived in France from the US LPGA Tour, where she produced five strong finishes to retain her playing card for next year. "It was a great relief and I can now plan for next year," she said. Three birdies in four holes from the 12th, after starting her round from the 10th tee, laid the foundations for Waugh. She found sand to drop her solitary shot of the day at the 7th, then completed her day with a birdie from 20 feet at her final hole. □ Paul McInley, of Ireland, shared the lead with Michael Campbell, of New Zealand, after adding a round of 67 to his opening 66 in the Old Pro-Am in Madrid yesterday.

Obituaries, page 25

Rugby? Kick it off the park for good

Like the British people's much trumpeted love of animals, which is so often distressingly at odds with matters of public record, I still take a lot of convincing that, as a nation, we actually like football. If we did we wouldn't be so desperate to keep alive the rotting corpse of rugby.

Consider this. Of the five schools local to me lucky enough to have playing fields adjoining them, there are an incredible 11 rugby pitches in operation. Full-sized rugby pitches. What on earth is that all about? That's almost one pitch per fan for this district and it is rooted in an authoritarian yearning of how things should be instead of how they actually are.

The coverage rugby gets and the scandalous time and space it receives at school level does not tally with actual public need or interest and it hasn't done for at least 50 years. How many times must we underline in big black ink that rugby, as part of the curriculum, is nothing but a residual tail, like Latin or potato printing. A spiteful middle-class imposition against populist wishes.

Why on earth schools still drag out the big Hs and try to indoctrinate susceptible 11-year olds that Here is Something Worth Mastering when rugby matches are so sparsely attended you could hunt caribou in the grandstand begs belief. The battle's over, boys. Football won. Everyone wants to play football all the time and nobody wants to play rugby. Be big. Swallow it. Trouble is, the rugbyist is as potty and vocal as any Dr Who-crazed oddball with access to the Internet.

I used to placate frothing rugby maniacs with phrases like "No-



body wants to kill it off, just get it in proportion", but now I have fine-tuned that approach. I do want to kill it off. It has, for me, come to represent The Man. It is the Anti-Sport. It is a selfish, self-serving blip that despite sinister and well-organised pressure groups has been publicly disowned and discredited.

Happily, at the fabulous old dump I attended, we never had rugby thrust upon us, but echoes of The Rugby Idea could always be found in the nanny-like way, come Christmas, football had to stop and hopeless boss-eyed affairs like shot-put and hop skip and jump had to be indulged in because, well, we were told, sport wasn't just football. Well no, sport can be

boxing, horseracing, fishing, poker and snooker, but those were never given as options, and in most schools still aren't. What they meant was: "Oh you LIKE sport do you? Well we'll show you it's not all fun and games."

This same nanny/rugby thought also triumphs when all public parks ritually take down the football goals on a designated date in spring. Nobody knows why they do this. One day you've got football goals with teams gagging to get at them — the next they've had the midnight lynch and been disappeared. So down go the shirts and bags where the posts used to be and the matches continue as usual. The council stubbornly refuses to bring those posts back until the rulebook says so. It's a bit like removing the lockers from the local lido every November because someone else feels you oughtn't swim in the cold weather.

However, nothing, nothing, says more about a nation living in sporting denial than the 11 smirking rugby pitches in one corner of South East London. I confess, though, far from being an actual member of Class War, it's true that when I dream these days, it is increasingly of H-shaped Welsh holiday cottages and attractive boxes of Swan Vests.

Hmmm. I have much more to say on this theme but possibly a lot of readers are looking at me with cold, squinting eyes right now. Besides, in a moment I'm bound to drift over into what I feel is The Real Meaning of Cricket and that might push you right over the odds.

Danny Baker is on Talk Radio (1053-1089am) every Saturday from 5.30pm.

Helen and Tim, best of the bunch

TODAY far and away the airwaves' best football show celebrates its 50th edition. It is Soccer AM on Sky Sports 2, which has been a quiet riot for some time now while more post-modern and testosterone vehicles have been grabbing the laddish attention. There are no better spots anywhere in sports broadcasting than Third Eye, Showboating and Pub Commentary, and Helen

Chamberlain and Tim Lovejoy, who present the show, are the best TV pairing since Chris Evans and Gaby Roslin fronted *The Big Breakfast*.

Quite why the rest of the "straighter" football shows at the station haven't embraced and trumpeted these two and their approach is deeply suspicious. Serve them right if they jump ship and rejuvenate the World Cup on ITV.



"Oi, ref, what are you up to? City's a big club you know. You can't give a penalty against us"

Face it, City. You're history

THERE'S a scene in *The Deer Hunter* when Robert De Niro holds up a bullet to his drunken workmate and says: "You see this, Stanley? This is this. This ain't something else. This is this." Like the rest of the baffled audience I received this information with a sly grin and sophisticated nod but actually had no idea what it meant — until this week when I found myself in a screaming match with a Manchester City supporter. For it suddenly occurred to me that this man, like most City supporters and a great number of fans of other so-called "sleeping giants", still thought that he supported a Big Side. That it was only a matter of time and tinkering until they inevitably shook off these minnows they have been boarding with and swanked around The Big League again lighting cigars with five-pound notes.

He really believed that teams such as City and Sunderland or Leeds and Liverpool come to that, ruled by divine right. What has so stirred up the

Maine Road mob recently is not so much that their side might struggle to nick a draw with the Spice Girls but that the whole "division one thing" has become tedious. They're bored with it. Rather grandly, they have become impatient.

When City were relegated it was with an insouciant yawn and the certain notion that once they'd spanked a few small fry bottoms, they would return to the Premiership as sure as night follows day. They, after all, were Manchester City. But chaps. Preston were once Manchester City. So were Blackpool. And Fulham. West Brom and Burnley.

It happens. While all glory may be fleeting, its obscurity that can live forever. Man City, this is not a crisis. This is this.

I AM writing this ten minutes before Man Utd play Feyenoord. I predict a 2-2 draw. (Pause). Woolool I reckon I placed.

Wimps of the Arctic

DURING the Tromsø v Chelsea tie the commentator was more than once to be heard stating that the pitch was so bad it might be refused by a Sunday side. For shame. No pitch is too bad for the dedicated amateur. Not 20 minutes from where I type these words is barny Brockwell Park, home to a selection of pitches so

sloped that no sensible side sets out to attempt a fixture without crampers, safety harnesses and a crack team of sherpas. I once met a bunch of squaddies who told me of the intense matches staged within the belly of a massive tank transporter flying at 30,000ft. If one side came too close to a winning goal, a

I AM writing this ten minutes before the start of Strasbourg and Liverpool. I predict Liverpool will win 2-1. (Pause). I'm getting worse at this.

Who are these weirdos?

IF YOU are a subscriber to satellite you'll know that the coverage for a game kicking off at 7.45pm usually begins at three the previous day. This is all well and good and adds to the subtle powder-keg type build-up. However, am I alone in phasing out the breathless Richard Keyes's opening speech? "Welcome indeed to Highfield Road where, in just under five hours' time, troubled Coventry City will do battle with an out-of-sorts Southampton and I'm delighted to say our guests, Kevin Moran and Brian Kilcline, will be with us every step of the way!" — in order to peer across his blazered shoulder at the smattering of lunatics who are in the ground already?

As Butch Cassidy was fond of saying: "Who are those guys?" Who, in their right mind gets to a football ground with hours to spare? Have they not jobs to go to? Yet there they are. And the most curious part of all is that they never seem to be claiming some plum spot either. They will perch up to the left or apologetically at the back of the family enclosure.

So who are they? One reasonable explanation is that they are simply warm bodies pressed into service by Sky in order to convince us that there is a very hot ticket indeed. The only other argument I'll accept is that they are harmless dummies left over from that peculiar era when Arsenal were so squeamish about building work in progress at Highbury that they painted a hideous mural at one end of the ground to create the illusion that it was full. It's well documented that many clubs lobbied for the introduction of the more docile imaginary spectator over the troublesome flesh and blood real thing. Perhaps it is this influence that flickers on today, glimpsed only by the keen-eyed during Sky's Feast of Football.

I AM writing this ten minutes before Chelsea play Tromsø. I foresee the result but, to be honest, I'd sooner suck on Ken Bates's beard than betray my lifelong abhorrence of these showbiz kids and play some psychic part in their victory. (Pause). You know what? I love football...

Big pitch for mass appeal

AFTER a gap of 150 years, cricket is to go back on the road in an attempt to popularise itself with the masses (Simon Wilde writes). Next year, from March to September, a four-man team and an articulated truck containing three portable pitches and equipment is to tour the country, making two-day stops at seaside resorts, shopping centres and country shows in an attempt to reach new audiences.

The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) hopes to raise the game's profile with young people, who will be encouraged to seek further involvement. The roadshow, which will be funded by the board's recent sponsorship deal with Vodafone, plans to visit as many of the ECB's 38 member counties as possible and work with their youth development officers.

Cricket achieved nationwide popularity after William Clarke took his All England XI around the Midlands and the North in the 1840s. It led to the birth of the county championship.

Darren Gough helped out as the roadshow spent the first of four days at the National Exhibition Centre, Birmingham, yesterday. "This is part of the build-up to the 1999 World Cup," he said. "If we get people interested, they can help us win it and they can start to play themselves."

CRICKET: MIDDLESEX SPINNER FACING RANDOM TESTS DURING 18-MONTH PROBATION PERIOD

Drugs verdict frees Tufnell for England tour of West Indies

BY ALAN LEE, CRICKET CORRESPONDENT

PHILIP TUFNELL preserved his England career yesterday by persuading a disciplinary hearing at Lords that his claims to take a routine drugs test last month was neither conscious nor calculating. He did not escape punishment but has effectively been put on probation rather than suspended, leaving him free to tour West Indies in the new year.

Tufnell, who was chosen randomly for a test during Middlesex's final championship match of the season, at Chelmsford, was fined £1,000 and must pay £250 towards the costs of the hearing. He is also subject to an 18-month ban, suspended on condition that he undertakes drugs tests at unspecified times both later this year and during 1998. He has 14 days to appeal, which seems an improbable contingency.

It could be thought that Tufnell has escaped lightly. There will doubtless be suspicions of a convenient leniency in the national cause. This, however, was not a straightforward case and it came down to the judgment of a five-man panel that one of England's renowned cricketers had not been trying to avoid detection; indeed, that his actions were not deliberate at all.

This was not the finest hour

of the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB). The claims of the new governing body that it rules openly and unaccountably with the presentation of a press conference by a single officer, the chief executive, Tim Lamb, who pre-empted questions with the disclaimer that he had no knowledge of the detailed proceedings.

It would seem, however, that Tufnell related that he had been unable to produce a satisfactory urine sample during the lunch interval on the relevant day and that, preoccupied by an eye infection, he had simply forgotten to return at the close of play. Short of concluding that he was lying, the panel had little option but to impose something short of the maximum sentence, which is as severe for avoiding a drugs test as for failing it.

Tufnell, who was accompanied by his Middlesex captain, Mark Ramprakash, faced four charges of breaching the anti-doping regulations and admitted to two. However, he strongly denied the other two, which related to his awareness and motivation in avoiding the tests, and the panel dismissed these charges.

In the absence of the chairman of the panel, Gerard Elias, Lamb was left to grope his way through the judgment but insisted there had been no thought given to Tufnell's England commitments. "The integrity of the regulations is more important than selection for a national side," he said.

Lamb added: "It is accepted by all concerned that the player was distinctly unwell on the day and he said his mind was in a turmoil. He argued that he forgot to take the test and the panel had to decide whether to accept this. Each case of this nature has to be treated on its merits and we should not underestimate the severity of the punishment handed down."

Tufnell heads for the Grace Gates at Lord's after receiving the decision of the disciplinary panel



Adams offered Sussex captaincy

BY IVO TENNANT

CHRIS ADAMS, the Derbyshire batsman who is considered approaches from other counties, has been offered the captaincy of Sussex. According to his agent, Jonathan Barnett, he is likely to become the highest paid England-qualified cricketer in the country.

Barnett, who represents a number of high-profile cricketers, is appealing against Derbyshire's registration of Adams as a list one player, which limits his options. Hence no decision will be reached over his future until the hearing at Lord's on November 11. Barnett is also threatening the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) with legal action if Adams's status is not changed. "Since the Bosman ruling, Chris should be able to move counties freely," he said.

"We have taken the advice of counsel and there is a very good chance we will resort to the law if Chris does not become a list two player. His main motivation in wanting to leave Derbyshire is not money but to play for England."

Two counties have offered Adams, who has yet to play Test cricket, a salary of almost £100,000. A third, Kent, do not intend matching that but Derek Upton, the chairman of

their cricket committee, remains hopeful of signing him. Sussex are the only county to offer him the captaincy. If Shane Warne, the Australia leg spinner, had joined them, Adams would have become either captain, in succession to Peter Moores, or vice-captain. "Chris is likely to be earning a basic salary of around £20,000-£30,000 more than any other English cricketer," Barnett said. "As an agent, I would encourage him to go for the best offer, but he may well not do so as he wants to join the county that gives him the best opportunity of playing Test cricket. The approach by Sussex is an interesting extra consideration."

Tony Pigott, the Sussex chief executive, was cautious when asked whether he expected Adams to join the county. "You do not know what can happen," he said. "We have talked to Chris but clearly there are still several counties after him."

Hugh Morris, 34, the Glamorgan opening batsman, was yesterday appointed the new technical director of the ECB. He will take up his post on November 3, succeeding Micky Stewart, who is due to retire as director of coaching and excellence at the end of the year.

Kirsten thwarts Pakistan

GARY KIRSTEN became the fifth South African to carry his bat through a Test innings yesterday as he led a sterling recovery from 98 for seven on the opening day of the third and final Test against Pakistan in Faisalabad.

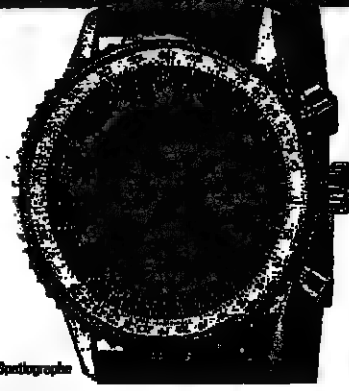
South Africa reached 239 thanks to Kirsten's century and a pugnacious 81 from Pat Symcox, the spin bowler, with whom he added 124 for the eighth wicket. Pakistan then lost both opening batsmen, Saeed Anwar and Ali Naqvi, while scoring 41 in reply.

Kirsten, 30, finished with exactly 100, his fifth Test century. "It is highly satisfying for me and the best thing is that I saved my team," he said. His stand with Symcox was a record for the eighth wicket against Pakistan in all Tests, beating the 120-run partnership between Madan Lal and Syed Kirmani, of India, at the same ground in 1983. Kirsten hit 15 fours in an innings, which lasted exactly five hours.

South Africa, who were able to recall Allan Donald and David Richardson, lost seven wickets in the first session of the day after Hansie Cronje won the toss. However, the last three wickets added 141, Symcox hitting nine fours and two sixes in a bold innings in which he faced only 53 balls.

Scoreboard, page 41

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FOOTBALL SATURDAY

Referees taken to task by Wenger

By Matt Dickinson

DENNIS BERGKAMP bids farewell to the FA Carling Premiership for more than a month tomorrow, but Arsène Wenger has ensured that his Dutch striker will not be going quietly.

Wenger, the Arsenal manager, is still enraged at the three-match suspension his premier performer has incurred after five bookings this season, and he left no doubt yesterday where he believes the blame lies. "Dennis has never had this problem before," he said. "Sometimes you have the feeling that he is a trophy now for referees. Who would have bet that after eleven games Dennis Bergkamp would have been suspended with five yellow cards?"

"Is he the nasty player of the league? I just don't know how it has happened. He is not an angel. He deserved one or two bookings, but certainly not all of them and not the one at Crystal Palace last week. Sometimes he does not get the protection with tackles from behind and defenders pulling on his shirt. Maybe it is because he complains to referees too much about that and they give him a yellow card when he does not deserve it. I will talk to him about it when he has the break."

The international break in the middle of next month means that Bergkamp will sign off at home to Aston Villa tomorrow and then not be seen in Premiership action until November 30, in the home game against Liverpool, although he may be called up in the Coca-Cola Cup.

Arsenal appear half the side without him, and maintaining the leadership of the Premiership will not be easy as he misses games against Derby County, Manchester United and Sheffield Wednesday. Bergkamp has scored ten goals in eleven league games this season, and his absence for the UEFA Cup first-round, first-leg encounter with PAOK Salonika, when Wenger's side lost 1-0, exposed Arsenal's lack of attacking options when they are without him.

"They seem prepared to put limbs and livelihoods at risk. It is plain that the match should not have started."

GARY M. PRIOR (ALLSPORT)



Di Matteo tends Babayaro, his fallen Chelsea team-mate, on the snowbound pitch in Tromsø. The Nigerian could count himself fortunate that he was not seriously injured in such difficult conditions

Chelsea get drift of Uefa's whim

You have to see something green on the pitch," Ruud Gullit said after the fiasco of Chelsea's Cup Winners' Cup match in northern Norway on Thursday. And the fact of the matter was that one saw scarcely any green at all, unless one raised one's eyes above both pitch and terraces to look at the majestic fir trees.

There has been some criticism of the way that Chelsea played in such outrageous circumstances. A schadenfreude, one might say: giant-killers are always popular in cup competitions, whether they be the Walsall team of 1933 that humbled mighty Arsenal or the Tromsø team that beat Chelsea 3-2 and could easily have doubled their score. Arsenal, all those years

ago, could present the excuse of a weakened team and an indulgent referee. Chelsea's extension was somewhat more solid. It was plain that the game should never have started and plainer still from half-time



onwards, when the snow came down, that the referee should have abandoned proceedings.

"I asked the Uefa man," Gullit, the Chelsea player-manager, said, "what did he think about it. He said: 'I can understand your point of view, but the game has to go on because of the busy schedule of Uefa.'"

This, with its implications, was a scandalous response. As one who has spent years trying, with a good deal of obstruction from Uefa, to unravel the murky manoeuvres of Italian clubs in European football, I have never had much faith in the European governing body. Money talks, but now it has grown so cacophonous that there is no chance of anyone or anything else being heard.

There was a significant moment in the second half on Thursday when Celestine Babayaro, Chelsea's precocious Nigerian left back, slipped after making a challenge and fell awkwardly on the snow. There was every possibility that he had hurt himself badly. After all, the worst injuries, as Alan Shearer knows only too well, often occur in the most banal circumstances.

In the event, Babayaro, who had never seen snow in his life, was able to get up and play on. But a pitch like this, in weather like that, constitutes a serious risk to limbs.

"Like I said, I am a guy who likes to play football, but to play football in normal circumstances," Gullit said. "It's very difficult to get into the right mood. We were 60 per cent in possession of the ball, the only thing was that it was difficult to get through."

Tromsø did not find it difficult at all. True, they scored their third goal when Chelsea were trying to replace Leboeuf with Myers, leaving them a man short in defence, but, against

BRIAN GLANVILLE



that, the Norwegians made a myriad of chances, several of which were missed by their burly, blond centre forward, Lange. He, with his fellow hefty blood, Aarst, gave Chelsea's faltering defence a terrible testing. The way to play in such appalling circumstances was

clearly to cut out the ornamental and, if you had big men up front to bang the ball long and swiftly upfield to them — bang it so that they could chase it, rather than be obliged to turn, as the Chelsea attackers so often were, on the shocking surface.

Conditions certainly deteriorated in the second half. As Gullit said: "The second obstacle [the pitch apart] was we played against the wind, against the snow. It gets into your eyes. You can't see nothing, and the ball didn't bounce. It was nothing to do with football."

It certainly was not and the whole picture comes into perspective when you reflect on how poorly Tromsø had been doing until this game, losing five out of their previous seven matches and being obliged to play in a relegation play-off. It is ironic indeed that the first leg, next Sunday, will take place in an indoor stadium.

Did some Chelsea players give a great deal less than others? Was the team immensely fortunate to be saved from humiliation by Gianluca Vialli's two dramat-

ic goals? The answer could well be positive, but again, even in the first half, the muddy parody of a pitch scarcely encouraged artists of the likes of Gianfranco Zola and Roberto di Matteo.

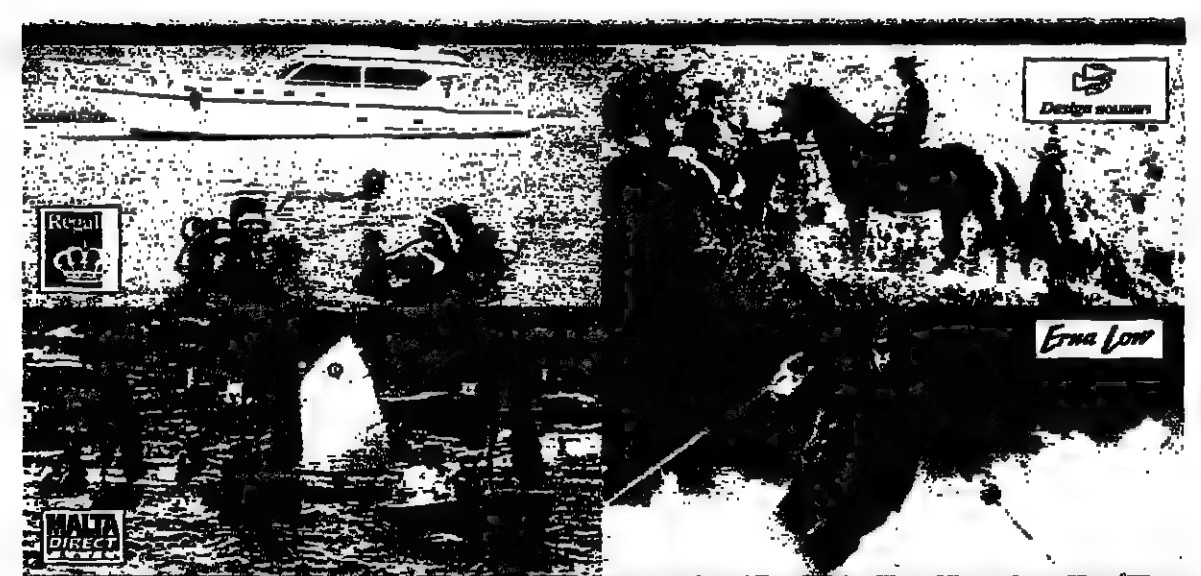
Vialli, by contrast, having done little, came suddenly and vibrantly to life in the closing minutes. Each of his goals came after a gem of a solo run, but with characteristic modesty he said that he had been helped by the mud, which had restricted the movement of the defenders opposing him.

It is to be hoped that Chelsea enter an official protest with Uefa at having been forced to play in such circumstances. How fortunate and unexpected that the Uefa official should so utterly give the game away with his remarks to Gullit.

If all that matters now is money, if players' limbs and livelihoods are to be put at risk, then it is time that members of Uefa, whether they be clubs or national associations, rose up and proclaimed their disgust.

AN EXCLUSIVE READER OFFER THE TIMES

Overseas Adventure activities offers



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Sheridan realises dream the second time around

Old Trafford is busy as usual. We are still a few days away from the next match but people mill all around holding carrier bags bulging with Manchester United paraphernalia.

Darren Sheridan, shoulders rolling, walks through the throng, unnoticed. He is a short, stocky man with an unpretentious manner and an unpretentious haircut, one of those that is the preserve of barbers of a certain age who smoke while they work, cough into the back of your neck and have more opinions than they do clean combs.

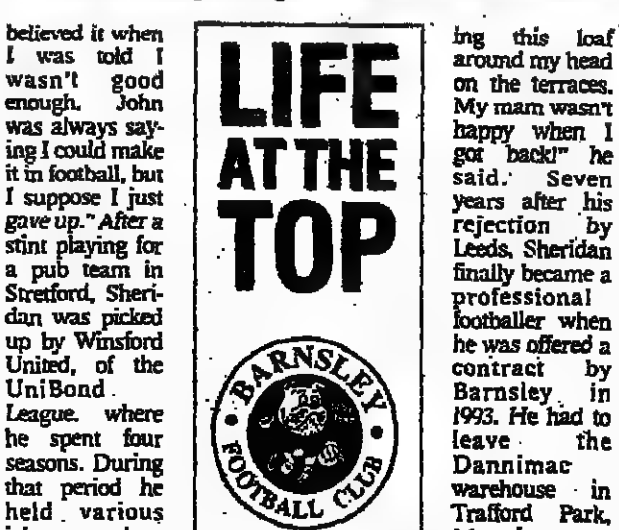
"I'm playing at Old Trafford on Saturday," Sheridan tells his coughing cohort. "Aye, and I'm singing with Frank Sinatra the weekend after next." Is the report, "It's a dream come true, isn't it?" Sheridan says, for the third time in ten minutes.

Footballers make statements like that all the time. Everything is a dream come true — the last goal, the next game, the impending transfer, the sponsorship deal with Reebok. The difference is that this is the real thing. A Mancunian and a Manchester United supporter, he will take his place in the Barmsey team against United at Old Trafford today. If he looks more like a postman, baker, warehouseman or labourer than he does a footballer, it is no coincidence because, at various times, he was all of those until a few years ago.

Like his older brother, John, Sheridan was an apprentice footballer with Leeds United. While John went on to play regularly for Leeds and later with Sheffield Wednesday and Bolton Wanderers, Darren was released at 18 by Billy Bremner, then the Leeds manager. "I thought that was the end of it," Sheridan said. "I



Sheridan lines up "alongside" his Old Trafford heroes



believed it when I was told I wasn't good enough. John was always saying I could make it in football, but I suppose I just gave up." After a stint playing for a pub team in Stretford, Sheridan was picked up by Winsford United, of the UniBond League, where he spent four seasons. During that period he held various jobs on short contracts and watched Manchester United as often as possible. On one occasion he was out of work and offered to call at the shops for bread and milk for his mother. On his way he met two friends about to board a train to London for a United game against Arsenal. "I got £60 out of the bank and went with them. I ended up swing-

ing this loaf around my head on the terraces. My mam wasn't happy when I got back," he said. Seven years after his rejection by Leeds, Sheridan finally became a professional footballer when he was offered a contract by Barnsley in 1993. He had to leave the Dannimac warehouse in Trafford Park, Manchester, where he worked in stock control. He has been a fixture in midfield for the past three seasons, where his combative, surrying approach has formed a protective vanguard for Barnsley's more expansive play. The opponent in his path today is likely to be David Beckham, and the contrast could not be greater. While

Beckham dates a Spice Girl, Sheridan lives modestly within a mile of Old Trafford with his girlfriend, Jannette, and their two young daughters. Beckham has patronage from pan-global companies while Sheridan is happy that a local ironmonger sponsors his kit. Beckham's annual income will be at least 15 times greater than Sheridan's. They will be equals for just 90 minutes on the pitch today.

Sheridan describes himself as a "biter around the ankles" player and he will be doing just that against United. "I don't feel out of place at all, me. I love it. I think we've got to get nastier as a team, if you know what I mean. There are some very clever players in the league and we've got to get among them. I think we've been showing them too much respect," he said.

Of the pitch, Sheridan is notoriously laid-back, to the point of not knowing the surname of some of his team-mates. "I couldn't say half of the names of the foreign lads even if I could remember," he said. "I just say: 'Hey, give me the ball, and they usually do.'" He also has problems with the Yorkshire dialect spoken in Barnsley. "It cracks me up," he said. "They come up to me and tell me I'm a chuffin' good player or a real good 'un."

He smiles constantly, as if, between speaking, he is telling himself private jokes. It is not an expression of smugness; in fact, it is quite endearing. "Wouldn't you be smiling?" he asks. "One minute I'm in a warehouse working all hours, and now I'm about to play at Old Trafford. It's a dream come true, isn't it?" There he goes again.

MARK HODKINSON

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CHANGING TIMES

FOOTBALL SATURDAY

Villain turns hero once more

It is 16 months since *that* penalty and Gareth Southgate has emerged a stronger character

It was hard to take everything in when the final whistle blew on that sultry night in Rome. Glenn Hoddle, John Gorman and a tight cluster of England staff were off the bench and dancing an impromptu ring-a-ring-a-roses and, away to the left, David Beckham, Paul Ince and Paul Gascoigne stood triumphantly in a line, arms around each other's shoulders, saluting the England fans.

When they turned and walked back towards the mêlée in the centre of the pitch, the eye followed them and roved around that teeming, amorphous mass of celebration. Then, suddenly, like a film camera that whizzes back to something in a blur, everyone's gaze flicked back to a flurry of action in the corner where the trio had been an instant before.

This time, it was Gareth Southgate who stood before the fans. He was alone with his joy, no one around him, but, for once, this man, who has for so long epitomised grace under pressure, who treated the trauma of his penalty shoot-out miss against Germany in the semi-finals of Euro 96 with candour and rare dignity, threw composure to the winds. He was acting like a man who had had a great weight lifted from his shoulders, pumping the air wildly with his right fist.

Everyone felt good for Southgate that night. He is one of the most respected players in the game, a man who lives by a code of common courtesy off the pitch and honest, skilful endeavour on it. "Sometimes in our world," he said, "that is seen as being an outstanding quality, but to me it should just be accepted."

Sometimes, it seems as if he is almost too good to be true. His transparent sincerity makes one fear for him, almost as though he is too vulnerable, too sensitive, too sensitive to survive in football's domain of flying elbows, thudding tackles and wheeler-dealing. To prosper as he has after what he has been through, though, there has to be a steel core. There are other sides to his nature.

When I am with a group of lads," he said, "I am going to be one of them. I am the first. If we are going out, to go and have a drink with the boys and make an idiot of myself as much as the next man. But there is a time and a place for that and we have got a responsibility to conduct ourselves in the right manner at the right time. At the right time, though, you have got to unwind because, blimey, it would be a dull life if you didn't." If anyone deserved a little unwinding on that night in Rome, it was Southgate. Gradually, the happiness of repeated successes are erasing the pain of the penalty miss.

Southgate has not yet been

OLIVER HOLT



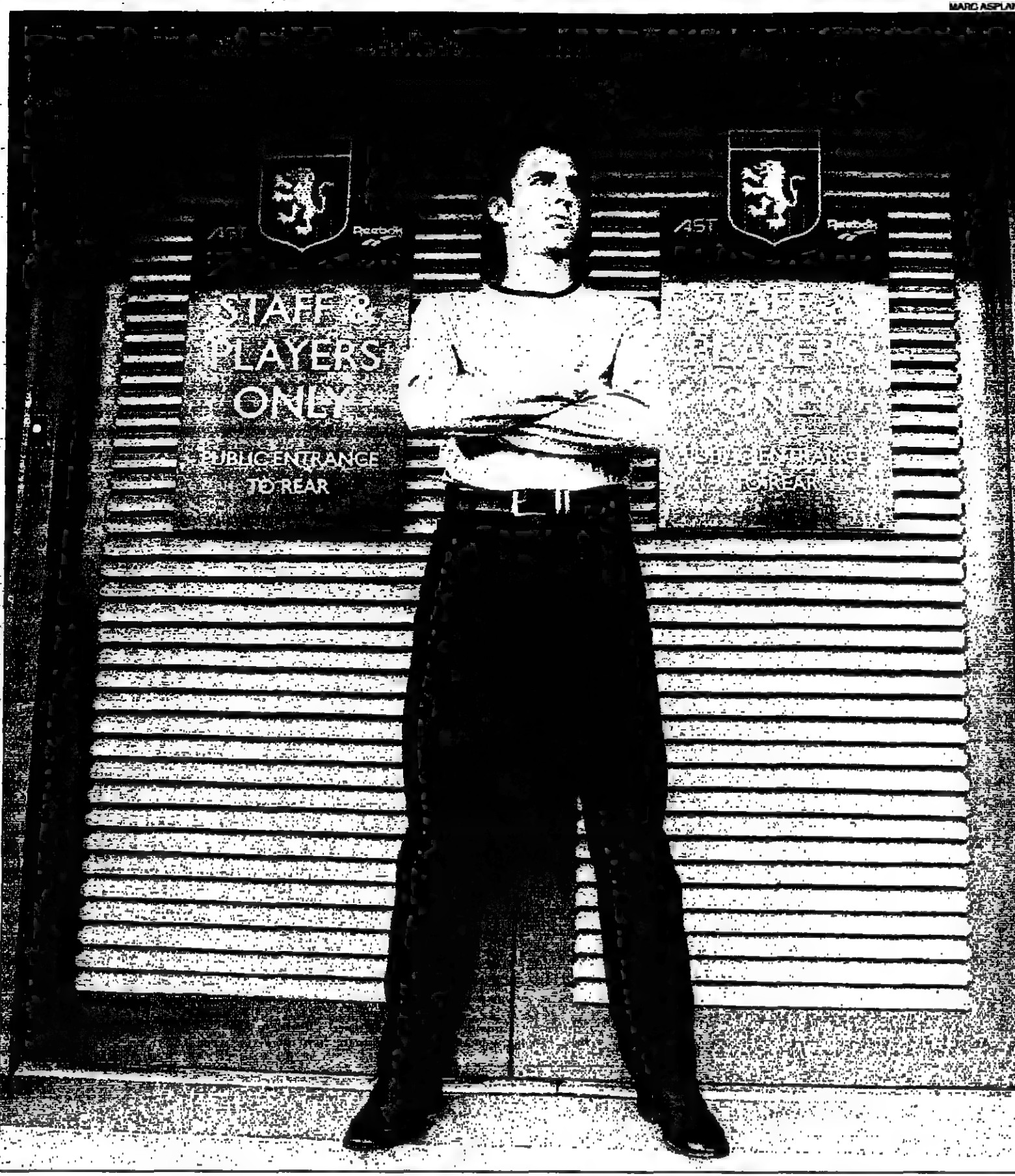
afforded the clean shot at redemption that Stuart Pearce was given against Spain in Euro 96, when he wiped away the memory of his saved penalty against Germany in the semi-finals of the 1990 World Cup with an emphatic spot-kick. Pearce's histrionic reaction showed just how much his earlier failure had been festering inside him.

But, as he sat on a couch at Aston Villa's training ground to the east of Birmingham yesterday, Southgate wore the air of a man who is at last beginning to believe that he has completed his atonement. His sin, anyway, was merely that he had the courage to take that sixth penalty when others did not, but he has suffered for it nonetheless.

He still gets the odd poisoned letter from poisoned minds that still harbour misplaced grudges but, in the 16 months since Euro 96, Southgate has proved himself, then proved himself again, and again. He was one of England's best players in the important victory over Poland in Katowice in May and turned in a flawless performance when it really mattered in Rome.

Last week, the Villa captain was the rock on which Athletic Bilbao foundered in the first leg of their Uefa Cup second-round tie and tomorrow he will stand at the heart of the Villa defence as it tries to stop Ian Wright and Dennis Bergkamp consolidating Arsenal's position at the head of the EA Carling Premiership. The challenges are coming thick and fast and Southgate has met them all. The future, once again, is more important than the past.

For a spell, something like the penalty miss does knock you," Southgate said, "but you have to decide whether you have worked hard all your life to then let one incident that was not within the course of a normal game of football destroy you, or whether you are going to bounce back and say: 'I have not worked my socks off for nine years to let that ruin everything'."



Guard of honour: Southgate has grown in stature since Euro 96 and has become a stalwart at the heart of the defence for Villa and England

"After a while, I sat back and decided I was not going to let that happen and that I was going to be single-minded enough to block out any of the negative feelings that people have shown towards me. I still get the occasional letter, but they do not leave their address on it. It is just a case of you pick it up, you see the start of it, then you just rip it up and throw it in the bin."

"I suppose time is a healer. Nothing will ever wipe it away completely because every time there is an article about you, it is: 'Gareth Southgate, whose penalty blab, blab, blab...' There is nothing I can do about that. But since that has happened, I have been in the side that qualified for the

World Cup. I played all but one of the qualifying games and I played when we won the tournament in France in the summer. So I could not have been involved in any more success."

"Possibly there was a sense of catharsis on that night in Italy. You do yearn for a moment that will symbolise success. You dream of scoring the winning goal. But I played as well as anybody in Poland, which was a fantastic result. Sure, you dream of doing something at the same level as the penalty, but of a positive nature."

"It is great to have the adulation of the crowd, but

having the respect of your team-mates and the management and them being happy with the job you have done is enough praise."

People do remember the penalty because it is the first thing they mention in conversation. I can't do anything about that. I must just try to achieve as much as I can in my career and hope that it will be a reasonably insignificant part of it in the end."

That, indeed, is the way things seem to be shaping up. With all his first-choice defenders fit, Hoddle chose Southgate above others for the match against Italy, and it now seems certain, barring

injury, that he will be in the squad for the World Cup finals next summer.

At 6ft, he is one of the smaller central defenders. He remembers turning up for his first England training session and seeking reassurance from Terry Venables, then the national team coach, that his height would not be a problem. Twenty-one caps later, he knows. "I just have to try to use my brain and try to pinch things in front or behind bigger men," Southgate said. "I have to try to read things a bit quicker."

He has got so good at it, has become such an integral part of the England set-up, that Hoddle even encouraged him in a little subterfuge before the

game in Rome. Southgate had passed a fitness test on a thigh injury the day before the game, but the England coach encouraged him to appear lacklustre in the final open training session because it might encourage the Italians to think that he was not fit and confuse their planning.

"It was actually fairly genuine," Southgate said, "because I had been suffering with the injury all week. I could not quite see the Italians thinking: 'Oh my God, Southgate's not playing, we're in', but it did no harm. Still, the Royal Shakespeare Company have not been on yet." Wise people, the RSC: they can spot a man who does not need to hide behind a false identity.

Sillett in trouble after flare-up

By Russell Kempson

PORTSMOUTH'S fall from grace — from fourth place in the Nationwide League first division in August, to 23rd before the game against Huddersfield Town this afternoon — has been accompanied by a plethora of disciplinary problems. They have had four players sent off this season and, yesterday, Neil Sillett, their physiotherapist, was charged with misconduct by the Football Association.

Sillett ran on to the pitch during the game against Bradford City at Fratton Park on Tuesday to treat Fitzroy Simpson, the Portsmouth midfielder, who had been fouled. However, he appeared to become involved in confrontations with Darren Moore, the Bradford player, and Chris Kamara, the Bradford manager.

Kamara has also been charged with misconduct. "They have 14 days to respond to the charge and request a personal hearing," an FA spokesman said.

Portsmouth, who have a £10,000 suspended fine hanging over them after previous misdemeanours, will at least be relieved that they will not face charges arising from the incident.

Huddersfield are not going too well, either — they are the only club below Portsmouth — and Peter Jackson, their new manager, has received a short, sharp lesson in how to deal, and how not to, in the transfer market. Jackson thought he had signed up Michael Evans, the Southampton striker, for £750,000 but was gazzumped by Ray Harford, the West Bromwich Albion manager.

"Next time, I think I'll play my cards closer to my chest," Jackson said. "We made a big bid for Michael earlier in the week but since then, West Brom did the same and he decided to go there."

Harford needed Evans to replace Paul Peachisoldo, who yesterday joined Fulham, the second division side, for a fee of £1.1 million. It takes the spending of Kevin Keegan, Fulham's chief operating officer, to £1.6 million since he and Ray Wilkins, the manager, took over at Craven Cottage last month.

"This is a sensible signing," Keegan said, "but don't expect us to spend silly money because we won't. This is the right player at exactly the right price."

Stockport County have also broken their transfer record, albeit more modestly, with the capture of Paul Cook, the Tranmere Rovers midfielder, for £250,000.

Another manager in the FA's bad books yesterday was Nigel Spackman, who takes his unbeaten Sheffield United side to play West Bromwich at The Hawthorns today. He has been charged with misconduct after allegedly making remarks to the referee after the 2-2 draw at home to Queens Park Rangers on Saturday.

Villa declare war on tippy French fish

ASTON VILLA welcomed Bordeaux supporters to Villa Park with a message, in French, in the match programme for their Uefa Cup first-round, second-leg match. It was an admirable effort spelt only by a slight hiccup in the translation of the warning not to bring anything alcoholic into the ground. The word "boissons" (drinks) had become "poissons" (fish), which caused much mirth among the Bordeaux faithful — the most fanatical of which, rather appropriately, are nicknamed the "Firihas". Villa security chiefs later reported that six bream, four roach and eight pike, in varying states of snapper, were confiscated at the turnstiles.

Ageing Ranger

Simon Barker, the Queens Park Rangers midfielder player, was delighted to receive a call to appear on a panel of experts on a television football show. As he is approaching the twilight stage of his career,

Barker, 32, was grateful that he should be selected for such an honour. However, he was less enamoured when he discovered the topic for conversation — "Players Getting Old".

Faux pas No 1

Liverpool's French farce apparently developed long before the first whistle of their Uefa Cup second-round, first-leg match in Strasbourg on Tuesday, in which they tum-

bled to a 3-0 defeat. In a French magazine interview that was published on the day of the game, David James, the Liverpool goalkeeper, hardly endeared himself to the locals with his initial response to the question-and-answer article. Q: "What do you know about Strasbourg?" A: "It begins with the letter 'S'. I thought it was in Germany." The latter observation is akin to calling a Scotsman English... no wonder the "Calamity James" nickname lives on.

SWINDON TOWN may have bowed out of the FA Youth Cup on Wednesday but they were not too downhearted. Their 3-2 defeat against "Harchester United" was staged only for the benefit of television — namely *Dream Team*, the 64-episode satellite soap — and defeat had been written into the script. Filming took place at the Bushy Studios near Watford. "It was a really enjoyable day out," Tommy Wheeldon, the Swindon youth team manager, said. Wheeldon's son, Thomas Jr, the former Swindon youth captain but now bit-part actor and Harchester United superstar, set up the deal. "I even accepted a bung from a *Dream Team* director, which will pay for our Christmas dinner," Wheeldon Sr said. "But don't tell the FA."

In the mad, mad, mad world of football, success is little guarantee of continued employment. Como lay fourth in the Italian third division, after an unbeaten run of two victories and four draws, but Mario Beretta, the coach, still got the bullet. Enrico Preziosi, the club president, pulled the trigger and then explained: "It was a tough but reasoned decision." Absolutely.

Grim reminder

Followers of Athletic Bilbao, Aston Villa's opponents in the Uefa Cup second round, provided a heart-warming conclusion to the first leg of the tie, which finished 0-0, in the San Mames Stadium on Tuesday night. Despite frustration at their side's inability to score, they applauded the small band of Villa fans and demonstrated that inter-club rivalry can be conducted in a pleasant and civilised manner. However, lurking beneath the surface was a reminder of the troubles that still afflict Bilbao. ETA, the Basque separatist movement, is believed to have strong links with the IRA in Ireland and an Irish tricolour hung from a guard rail in the San Mames. It bore a familiar message: "We've not gone away, you know."

STRANGE BUT TRUE: Manchester City have five pairs of players with the same surname — the Whitneys, Morleys, Fentons, Browns and McNabs.

Part-time option may suit Irish

NORTHERN Ireland could appoint a part-time manager to succeed Bryan Hamilton, who was dismissed on Thursday (Russell Kempson writes). Speculation that it might be Martin O'Neill, the Leicester City manager, coincided with a drop of 16p in the Leicester shares, which were floated on the Stock Market yesterday, from the opening trading price of £1.10.

Jim Boyce, the president of the Irish Football Association, said: "If a part-time appointment is the right way forward, then we will do that. I would prefer a full-time manager but we won't appoint someone full-time if a part-time candidate is better."

O'Neill reacted with caution and characteristic humour. "I'm stunned that I can have an effect on the Stock Market but I would rather not make any comment on the situation at this stage," he said. "I don't know the ins and outs of what would be involved."

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FOOTBALL SATURDAY

Players must accept blame for shaming the name of Liverpool

Our manager has stated twice in the past week that we have produced performances not acceptable to Liverpool Football Club. You will find no one in the dressing-room rushing to disagree with him. It is our manager, Roy Evans, and nobody has a problem with that. We have played badly during the past week, and we know that we deserve taking to task. There are no excuses.

The manager is there to be critical when necessary — it's his job. It's a strange thing, but when the manager comes into the dressing-room and shouts and bawls, we all tend to agree with him. You see, when it gets to that stage, we know we deserve it. It doesn't matter what level you are at, if a team plays badly, the manager lets rip afterwards. Even in the Sun-

day leagues, the boss will have a bit of a shout — even if he's just someone's dad.

The point is that it's a natural thing, but also hardly necessary. The players know that they haven't performed to the level demanded of Liverpool. We have been severely criticised, and quite rightly too, but it's not as if the players don't care. I know our supporters can get that impression but, truly, it's not the case.

We were devastated by the events of last week. We are desperate to win every game, and no professional ever goes out thinking that they won't bother too much in a certain match. It happened: that we played very badly, but it was not planned.

What can we do? Well, the only thing is to knuckle down and attempt to learn from our mistakes. What was frustrating and

annoying is that, before the Everton game, we had played very well, against both Chelsea and West Bromwich Albion. We know that we can play at the level required, so there is not a crisis in the sense that some would have you believe.

But in saying that, we have brought on all this talk of problems at Anfield, and we have to resolve it. We know we can play well, but we have to do it more consistently. Our response since Tuesday has been to unite to try to put things back on course. It is what our supporters demand. The only way that we can do that is to work on our failings on the training ground and take as positive an attitude as possible onto the pitch. There must be reflection, but not moping.

What has been upsetting is the pressure that has suddenly been



McMANAMAN'S WORLD

put on the manager. There has been plenty of talk about his job, and that is unfair. It is wrong that our performances during an extremely bad week should have turned the focus so intensely on him. There have been questions asked about his management, but the questions should have been directed at the players.

The manager has made his opinion known, but he also knows he's part of it too. One thing is certain — the players are right behind the manager. The last thing we want is talk to surface of the boss being under pressure. We

have a responsibility to him to make sure that there is no more talk of his job being on the line, and the only way we can do that is to start producing good form consistently.

I believe this is a big year for

English clubs in Europe. We came close last season, with both ourselves and United making the semi-finals of their respective competitions, and we need to take that a step further.

The national team is doing well, and there seems to be a renewed respect for our teams across the Continent. That momentum will be maintained only if we can show that we can rival the biggest clubs across Europe.

Don't be against it happening, either. United have won three matches out of three in the Champions' League so far and you couldn't ask for more than that. They are looking comfortable and, with a home game against FC Kosice to come, they look to be in a decent position to qualify for the quarter-finals. Newcastle, too, are still in with a good chance of qualifying for the next stage.

I'd better not shout it loudly, but Liverpool still have a chance, too. True, we are three goals behind and we played badly, but we also created plenty of decent chances, which is something that we didn't do against Paris Saint-Germain last season.

Remember that in the second leg against Paris we gave them a real run for their money, and could easily have snatched the tie. I don't believe that Strasbourg, as well as they played in the second half, are as good a team as Paris.

We showed that they can be vulnerable at the back. With a little luck, we could have scored a goal or two, and that gives us a glimmer of hope for the second leg. Who knows, with our support behind us on one of those amazing European nights at Anfield, we might just surprise a few people yet.

■ Welcome back, Jamie. One good thing that came out of the game on Tuesday, perhaps the only good thing, was the return of Jamie Redknapp. He has suffered terribly in the past year with an ankle problem, and it is good to see him emerge from his problems.

Even when Jamie was playing last year, his ankle wasn't right. People didn't know, but he was playing in terrible pain at times, and he really suffered. In the end, he got a break on exactly the same spot where he had trouble, and it was obviously a weakness, or maybe a hairline fracture.

Now, though, that appears to be all behind him. The break has healed well, and he has returned ahead of schedule. It can easily be lost in a poor team performance, but Jamie played really well on the night in France and that speaks volumes for his attitude.

STEVE McMANAMAN

□ Next week: Frank Leboeuf

FA CARLING PREMIERSHIP

(Last week's position in brackets)				HOME					AWAY					LAST 10 MATCHES W-D-L	Overall
Rank	Team	Pts	Goal Diff	W	D	L	F	A	W	D	L	F	A		
1. ARSENAL (1)		23	+17	4	1	0	15	1	2	4	0	12	9	6-4-0	D1
2. BLACKBURN ROVERS (3)		11	+11	3	2	1	13	7	3	2	0	8	2	5-4-1	W2
3. MANCHESTER UNITED (2)		22	+10	4	1	0	10	3	2	3	1	6	3	5-4-1	D1
4. CHELSEA (5)		10	+11	3	0	1	8	5	3	1	2	17	9	6-1-3	W1
5. LEICESTER (4)		11	+5	2	3	1	9	6	3	0	2	5	3	4-3-3	L2
6. DERBY COUNTY (6)		10	+8	3	2	0	11	4	2	0	3	8	7	5-2-3	D2
7. LEEDS UNITED (9)		11	+3	2	1	3	6	7	3	1	1	9	5	5-1-4	W1
8. WEST HAM UNITED (11)		11	-2	4	0	1	10	4	1	1	4	5	13	4-1-5	W1
9. LIVERPOOL (7)		10	+4	3	0	1	10	5	1	3	2	6	7	4-3-3	L1
10. NEWCASTLE UNITED (8)		8	-1	4	0	1	6	4	1	0	2	2	5	5-0-3	L1
11. WIMBLEDON (15)		11	0	1	2	3	6	7	2	2	1	7	6	3-3-4	D1
12. TOTTENHAM HOTSPUR (14)		11	-4	3	2	1	7	6	0	2	3	2	7	3-4-3	W1
13. ASTON VILLA (10)		11	-5	2	1	2	6	9	2	0	4	6	8	4-1-5	L1
14. CRYSTAL PALACE (13)		11	-4	0	2	3	3	8	3	1	2	6	5	2-3-5	D1
15. COVENTRY CITY (12)		11	-5	2	4	0	8	6	0	2	3	0	7	1-6-3	L1
16. EVERTON (18)		10	-3	3	1	2	11	9	0	1	3	2	7	3-2-5	W1
17. SHEFFIELD WEDNESDAY (16)		11	-10	2	1	2	7	9	0	2	4	9	17	2-3-5	L1
18. BARNLEY (20)		11	-19	2	0	4	5	14	1	0	4	4	14	3-0-7	W1
19. BOLTON WANDERERS (17)		10	-7	0	3	1	1	2	1	2	3	7	13	1-5-4	L2
20. SOUTHAMPTON (19)		11	-10	2	1	3	6	7	0	0	5	2	11	2-1-7	L1

Goals scored	Average	Pens	Dead ball	Open play	Head
1. Chelsea	2.50	2	4	19	5
2. Arsenal	2.45	1	4	17	3
3. Blackburn	2.11	1	3	17	3
4. Derby	1.90	2	3	14	4
5. Liverpool	1.80	2	2	12	1
6. Manchester Utd	1.45	0	3	13	3
7. Sheffield Wed	1.45	3	1	12	4
8. Leeds	1.38	0	6	9	5
9. West Ham	1.36	0	3	12	2
10. Everton	1.30	1	6	7	5
11. Leicester	1.27	0	7	7	5
12. Wimbledon	1.20	0	3	10	5
13. Aston Villa	1.09	0	4	8	1
14. Newcastle	1.00	0	1	7	1
15. Crystal Palace	0.90	1	0	8	2
16. Barnsley	0.82	1	2	6	4
17. Tottenham	0.82	0	3	6	3
18. Bolton	0.80	1	1	6	1
19. Coventry	0.80	0	3	5	2
20. Southampton	0.73	0	2	6	1

Goals conceded	Average	Pens	Dead ball	Open play	Head
1. Manchester Utd	0.54	0	2	4	1
2. Blackburn	0.82	1	1	7	0
3. Leicester	0.81	0	2	8	4
4. Arsenal	1.00	1	2	9	3
5. Leeds	1.12	1	4	6	4
6. Derby	1.12	0	4	5	4
7. Newcastle	1.18	1	2	10	2
8. Coventry	1.18	1	3	9	1
9. Crystal Palace	1.18	1	4	8	1
10. Tottenham	1.20	1	2	9	2
11. Liverpool	1.20	1	2	10	3
12. Wimbledon	1.40	0	2	12	2
13. Chelsea	1.50	0	2	13	4
14. Bolton	1.54	1	2	14	4
15. Aston Villa	1.54	1	3	13	4
16. West Ham	1.54	1	3	11	4
17. Everton	1.64	1	3	14	5
18. Southampton	1.64	1	3	14	5
19. Sheffield Wed	2.36	0	5	21	5
20. Barnsley	2.54	2	7	19	6

Goals per half	1st	2nd
Arsenal	17	10
Aston Villa	5	7
Barnsley	17	4
Blackburn	17	4
Bolton	5	3
Chelsea	13	12
Coventry	5	3
Crystal Palace	5	4
Derby	10	9
Everton	4	9
Leeds Utd	12	3
Leicester	4	10
Liverpool	4	12
Manchester Utd	6	10
Newcastle	4	4
Sheffield Wed	6	10
Southampton	2	6
Tottenham	5	4
West Ham	4	11
Wimbledon	3	10

Goals per half	1st	2nd
1. Leeds Utd	25	1
2. C Palace	26	0
3. Bolton	22	3
4. Chelsea	21	3
5. Coventry	23	1
6. Arsenal	23	0
7. Everton	20	2
8. Sheffield Wed	20	2
9. West Ham	22	0
10. Tottenham	19	1
11. Manchester Utd	20	0
12. Derby	19	0
13. Southampton	19	0
14. Barnsley	17	0
15. Wimbledon	17	0
16. Blackburn	14	2
17. Liverpool	15	0
18. Leicester	15	0
19. Newcastle	11	0
20. Aston Villa	8	1

Goals per half	1st	2nd
1. S Dunn	4	24
2. G Willard	6	30
3. P Durrin	6	30
4. G Ashby	5	23
5. P Alcock	5	22
6. D Elenny	6	29
7. M Bodenham	6	24
8. M Reed	3	11
9. U Rennie	6	23
10. G Barber	5	18
11. M Riley	5	18
12. G Poli	8	26
13. P Jones	6	17
14. J Winter	6	16
15. D Gallagher	6	15
16. A Wilde	7	17
17. K Burge	6	15
18. N Barry	5	12
19. S Lodge	6	10

Goals per half	1st	2nd
1. S Dunn	4	24
2. G Willard	6	30
3. P Durrin	6	30
4. G Ashby	5	23
5. P Alcock	5	22
6. D Elenny	6	29
7. M Bodenham	6	24
8. M Reed	3	11
9. U Rennie	6	23
10. G Barber	5	18
11. M Riley	5	18
12. G Poli	8	26
13. P Jones	6	17
14. J Winter	6	16
15. D Gallagher	6	15
16. A Wilde	7	17
17. K Burge	6	15
18. N Barry	5	12
19. S Lodge	6	10

Clean sheet	Failed to score
Arsenal	5
Aston Villa	3
Barnsley	2
Blackburn	6
Bolton	3
Chelsea	4
Coventry	4
Crystal Palace	2
Derby	2
Everton	2
Leeds Utd	3
Leicester	5
Liverpool	2
Manchester Utd	7
Newcastle	4
Sheffield Wed	2
Southampton	2
Tottenham	4
West Ham	1
Wimbledon	1

Clean sheet	Failed to score
Arsenal	5
Aston Villa	3
Barnsley	2
Blackburn	6
Bolton	3
Chelsea	4
Coventry	4
Crystal Palace	2
Derby	2
Everton	2
Leeds Utd	3
Leicester	5
Liverpool	2
Manchester Utd	7
Newcastle	4
Sheffield Wed	2
Southampton	2
Tottenham	4
West Ham	1
Wimbledon	1

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Barnsley	2
Blackburn	6
Bolton	3
Chelsea	4
Coventry	4
Crystal Palace	2
Derby	2
Everton	2
Leeds Utd	3
Leicester	5
Liverpool	2
Manchester Utd	7
Newcastle	4
Sheffield Wed	2
Southampton	2
Tottenham	4
West Ham	1
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TELEVISION: BBC1: Today, Football Focus, from 12.20pm; Match of the Day, from 10.50pm. Tomorrow: Match of the Day (repeated), from 1.15pm. Sky Sports: 1. Tomorrow: Goals on Sunday, from 11am. Arsenal v Aston Villa (live), from 3pm. Spanish League, Deportivo La Coruña v Celta Vigo, from 12.30pm. 2. Today: Soccer AM, from 8am. Tomorrow: Soccer AM, from 8am. Queens Park Rangers v Manchester City (live), from 12pm. (Highlights from 8pm). 3. Tomorrow: Premiership Highlights, from 10pm. RADIO: BBC Radio 5

The Lion hunting bigger games

Matt Dawson's tries in South Africa guarantee nothing in terms of selection for England

Images of the British Isles' triumphant tour to South Africa in the summer are easily summoned, a mere three months after the event. One of them is of a slight, crop-haired figure ghosting past an apparently transfixed defence, casually touching down and then sharing the moment with rugby's Barny Army in Cape Town.

DAVID HANDS



a year later Dawson was dropped for the meeting with Italy. "I spent a week moping around but worrying doesn't get the place back," Dawson said. "I had to disregard the England games, the A games and tell myself that I had to play out of my skin in every club game, and that's what got me onto the Lions tour."

The cynics would say that Ian McGeechan's influence — as director of rugby at Northampton and coach to the Lions — was of material assistance but McGeechan would have no part in the discussion of players from his own club, and Dawson's own form on tour (he scored two of the Lions' three tries in the three-match series) flung the lie back in the teeth of his critics. It takes a special quality to inherit the mantle of one of the world's leading players — the injured Robert Howley — and to compete on an equal footing with one of the other class acts, Joost van der Westhuizen.

That tour has made Dawson a stronger, better competitor. "You can never sit back and rely on what happened last summer but what does remain with you is the memory of what it took to get there, what we went through before we won the series in Durban," Dawson said.

"Two weeks ago, when Northampton weren't going so well, I went back to the tour and tried to reconstruct parts



Dawson, the hub of the British Isles XV, is now seeking to cement his place at scrum half in the England team once again on the back of impressive displays for Northampton

of the approach to the big games.

"I remember thinking how nothing else mattered than to play five minutes, 20 minutes, a whole game for the Lions. I remember rooming with Neil Jenkins in Durban and how both of us, even Jenks with his 50 caps for Wales, were desperate to play just the once for the Lions. That's the quality of thought those of us on the tour bring back to the club and what we need to produce, week after week." It worked last week. Having stumbled through the European Confer-

ence, Northampton's level of preparation went up several notches and they beat Leicester, the Pilkington Cup holders, in the Allied Dunbar Premiership.

The tour helped develop an equilibrium in Dawson which, at base, was probably there anyway. The younger of two children, his love of the game was fostered by the enthusiasm of his father, Ron, and at the Royal Grammar School, High Wycombe, although his performance on the games field was not matched by success in the classroom.

Northampton welcomed him aboard, played him at centre, and dispatched him for three months to the Te Awamutu club in Waikato, New Zealand, where he discovered the qualities of mental hardness that were to stand him in such good stead later on. He worked for, and retains strong links with, the Firm Security company in Northampton before accepting the suggestion of his flatmate and fellow player, Brett Taylor, and becoming a student teacher at Spratton Hall preparatory school.

"When I finish in the first-class game, I wouldn't go back to teaching in the formal sense but I have an eye on taking a degree and I would like to coach," Dawson said. "I've found I'm quite good at communication and you have to look at opportunities which will dovetail with the end of your active career. That's the advantage of rugby."

"The decision to become a full-time professional was made easier by that fact that I had no qualification to do anything else. I always wanted to be a rugby player and, now

that the corporate side of the game is developing, you never know who you'll meet. I enjoy meeting the chairman of this company or the managing director of that company, and there are a lot of successful business people in Northampton who tend to converge on the club."

It is a case, you might say, of a scrum half exploiting the gap when it occurs. Northampton was right for Dawson and he believes he is right for the club: he has a loyalty to the Saints that would take an uncommon amount of money

to shift, and a perspective that other players would do well to note. "You can't just walk into a club and expect money — you have to earn it," he said.

"There has to be something else — as an ambitious player, I want to be part of a team that plays a cup final, plays in Europe, wins the league. When we get into the top four our players will deserve more — and they will probably get it."

By then, too, Dawson will have discovered whether England's new management also feel that he is right for them.

Television cameras provide some light relief after poor performance in home defeat

This week the television cameras have been at Wasps filming the credits for the new Rugby Express series on Channel 5, which is taking over from the BBC's Rugby Special. We opened our facilities to about fifty or sixty players from local junior clubs, plus camera crews, for the three-day shoot. It's nice for them to come to a club like ours and I hope they enjoyed the experience. It is good to see that rugby is going to get exposure on terrestrial television.

There are a lot of people who miss the Sunday afternoon rugby slot and the chance it provided for them to catch up with the week's events. It's important for the profile of the game that it has as many avenues for exposure. I have Sky and I'm a big fan, but there is a need to offer the people who don't have Sky, or don't want it, the chance to watch these matches. It's great for rugby.

The media is part and parcel of the game. The coverage has never been greater for rugby than it is now on radio and television and in the newspapers. I did a forum on the Internet for my book launch and the amount of questions that came through was huge: it reinforces the level of interest in the game.

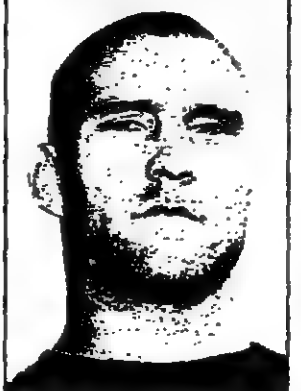
As far as handling the media is concerned, people ask you questions and you give them honest answers — that's what people want. You have got to be sensible about when is the right time to talk to the media. Alex

Sky no longer the limit as interest rate soars

Ferguson lets his Manchester United players know when that is that's the example for others to follow.

It was disappointing to have lost our first home league game against Saracens last Sunday. Perhaps we got a little bit too carried away with our European success — although they were hard games, we were not having to work so hard for victory in certain matches. We lost the game because we underperformed. This season, if you play badly you lose, whereas last year, even if we didn't perform, we managed to get away with a narrow win, particularly against sides such as Bristol and Northampton. It is going to be a lot more competitive this season. Bath

LAWRENCE DALLAGLIO



lost the opener against Newcastle and have improved since then: Leicester, a side whose hallmark was getting out of jail when they underperformed, went to Northampton last week and got a substantial beating. Their meeting this weekend will be fascinating.

We didn't lose through complacency — Saracens are a good side, we knew that — but, in Europe, we were successful with first-phase possession a lot more than we would be against a good defensive side

in the league. We would win a lineout and drive through the middle or we would have a back-row move off a scrum and it would be successful. We hadn't really been asked questions in terms of retaining possession and

putting together phases of play that are going to create pressure. What last week taught us is that we have to get back to being patient in both attack and defence. We created chances but didn't take them. There is not going to be any panic, though. We just had an extremely bad day at the office. We had an extra training session on Wednesday to work on things: work it out of our system. I take losing very, very personally indeed and you can't exercise that feeling until you play the next game, which is London Irish tomorrow. We will be without Andy Gomarsall and Alex King, who are both injured.

One of the reasons we were so successful last season was that we were able to limit the number of injuries. There is an element of luck about that, but it was also to do with the team being incredibly fit. If you are fit, you won't get what I call avoidable injuries, such as pulled calf muscles.

It's important to have strength in depth, particularly at half back: No 10 and No 12 are pivotal positions. We have Martin Wood, the England Under-21 scrum half, so his coming in is not a weakness. Gareth Rees has played more than 40 times for Canada at fly half, so there wouldn't be a weakness there, either, and Guy Gregory, whose goalkicking was responsible for getting us into Europe, is also around.

Johnson's men need a lift

BY DAVID HANDS

EARLY in the Allied Dunbar Premiership season it may be, but neither Bath nor Leicester, who meet at Welford Road today, are accustomed to looking up the table to see who is perched ahead of them. Yet the days when these clubs provided the defining moments of an entire season are gone — money has seen to that.

"Clubs like ourselves, Bath and Wasps can no longer play at 70 per cent and hope to win," Martin Johnson said. "But you need that competition. Newcastle and Richmond respectively first and third in the division have come in, fresh and keen; Saracens, Gloucester, everyone has a competitive squad. If you have a bad day, you are going to be beaten."

Johnson's Leicester players had such a day at Northampton last weekend, and the team had been missing even before defeat at Franks Gardens. Johnson, who captained the British Isles in South Africa, admits that many of his Lions colleagues — five from Leicester — are not displaying their best form.

He attributes that to disruption in the pre-season but also acknowledges the possibility

of staleness affecting players involved in so long a domestic 1996-97 season and then striving for even greater peaks with the Lions. The inspiring example to others is that he holds his own form so well, but if the visit of Bath does not act as a spur to an unchanged Leicester XV, nothing will.

"Bath and Leicester has been, and always will be, special," Jonathan Callard, picked by Bath at full back ahead of Ian Balshaw, said. "The tradition and the trophies we have collected guarantee a long-term rivalry, hostility and respect."

Leicester have played only two Premiership games, as have Wasps, the champions. The Londoners are involved in one of four first division matches being played tomorrow in a busy weekend for the capital. Harlequins, with Massimo Cutitta returning from duty with Italy, play Sale today and London Irish and Saracens (against Gloucester) are in action tomorrow.

To add spice, London Scottish play Bedford this afternoon in the clash between the clubs leading the second divi-

sion, but all their first division rivals will be looking north to see Newcastle's result against a resurgent Richmond, with whom they were promoted last season. Richmond's second-half display against Harlequins last weekend, prompted by Allan Bateman, was extraordinary and Newcastle remain without two England internationals, Tim Stimpson (damaged thigh) and John Bentley. Stuart Legg plays full back and Bentley is only a replacement.

Richmond have yet to defeat Newcastle in the league and will look to Bateman to display his mid-field skills against an old acquaintance from rugby league days, Vaisiga. Tuganala, Wales, too, will be encouraged by Bateman's form, with internationals against Tonga and New Zealand looming, and their selectors will make further assessments today when Cardiff play Ebbw Vale and Pontypridd visit Newport in the Welsh League.

David Young, Cardiff's experienced prop, has damaged ribs and two other internationals, Robert Howley and Emyr Lewis, may be rested.



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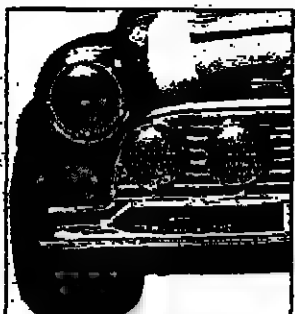
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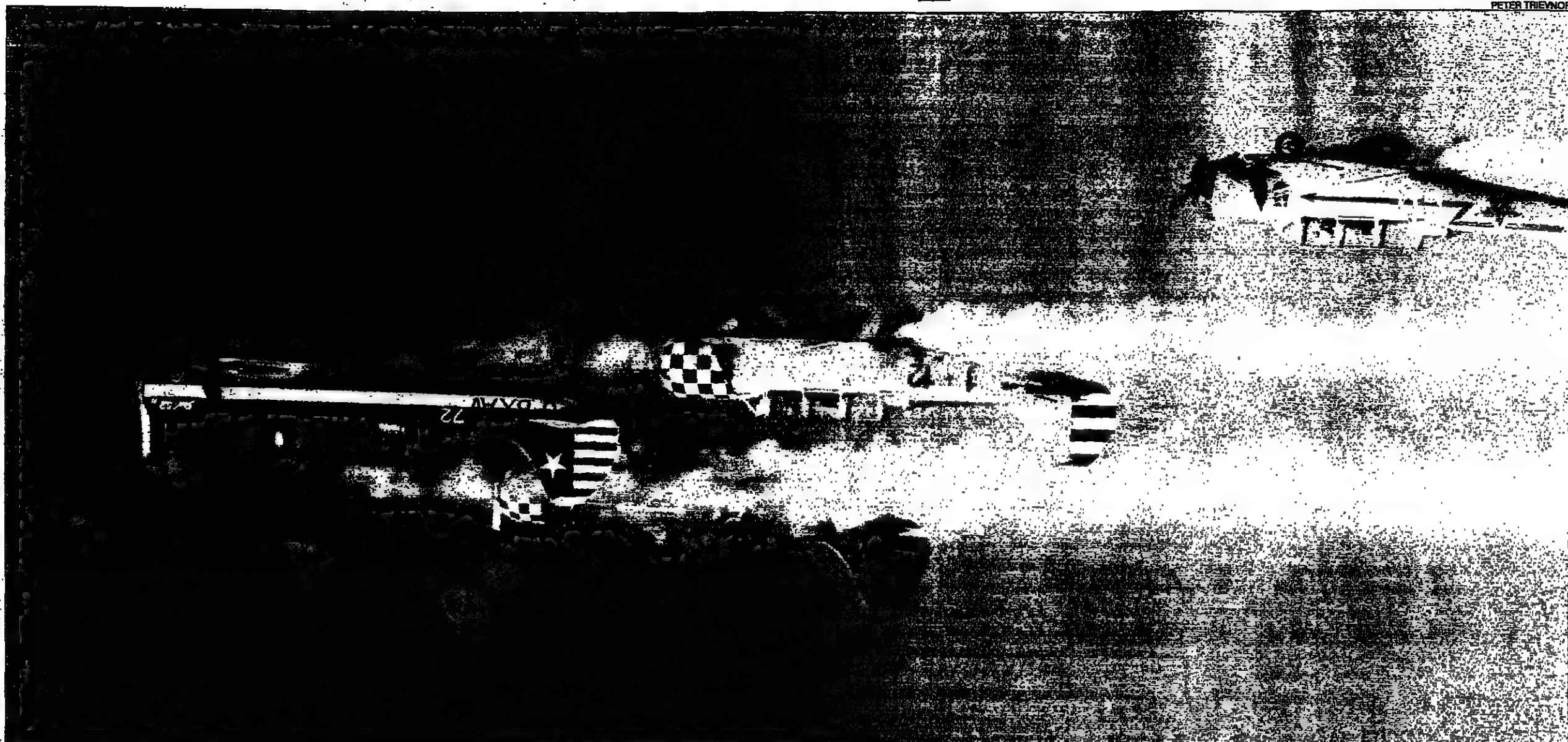
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SATURDAY OCTOBER 25 1997

Aerostars do it upside down



Five take to the air the hard way: the Aerostars team trained with the RAF and a Red Arrows pilot and bear a simple principle in mind in their Russian Yak-52s — "Rule One: Do not crash. Rule Two: Always obey Rule One!"

Stuart Birch meets five amateur acrobatic airmen good enough to take on the world's top daredevils

Each of the five men appeared to be in serious pain, slumped over the grass in a group, heads rolling or craning backwards, eyes raised to heaven. Each held his right hand at waist height, fist clenched. Suddenly, they turned in tight circles before two broke away, circled on their own with quick, short steps then rejoined the others. The leader was issuing a litany of orders: "Run towards Aces. High, pulling... go, break... go, complete loop, wingover, right reversal into caterpillar..."

It may seem a strange way for grown-ups to spend a Saturday afternoon, but Mark, Gene, Andy, Jeff and Garry go through this balletic sequence almost every time they meet. They are the Aerostars, an amateur acrobatic troupe — three of them just have an ordinary Private Pilot's Licence (PPL) — the like of which probably does not exist anywhere else in Europe.

Their individual flying experience ranges from 7,000 hours to a relatively brief 330, but the flying five loop, roll, climb and dive their rugged Russian Yak-52 ex-military trainers as one.

And next year they plan to contest the Fédération Aéronautique Internationale (FAI) World Grand Prix in Switzerland — amateurs appearing among some of the world's top professionals.

They take their hobby very seriously. Before they go whirling around the sky in tight formation, the Aerostars always walk together, simulating every roll, loop, twist and turn and each radio call of their 12-minute show, right hands clasping an imaginary stick, thumbs pushing imaginary radio talk buttons. "Going through the motions" on foot is vital.

The results in the air are impressive. With a combined engine capacity of 50 litres, the five Yaks' Ivchenko radial engines are orchestrated into a thunderous rumble as they move smoothly through the carefully rehearsed routines towards a smoke-trailing, high-g-pulling finale called "Red Star Burst".

Although in aerobatic terms each Aerostar is an amateur, there is rather more to them than that. Leader, Mark Levy (7,000 hours' flying time) is a British Airways First Officer who flies Boeing 757s and 767s. Gene Willson is not only a commercial aircraft pilot (7,000 hours), but also managing director of Titan Airways based at Stansted. Fortunately, BA and Titan passengers are unaware that their pilots



Willson, Hammond, Sharp, Stow and Levy: "We compromise between what looks impressive and what is achievable"

are only really happy when flying upside down. The three PPLs are Andy Hammond (450 hours), once a rock musician, now a director of construction and computer software companies; Jeff Stow (850 hours), an industrial heating technician who currently runs his own property maintenance company, and Garry Sharp (330 hours), who specialises in recruiting directors to a wide variety of company boards.

"There is a huge disparity in experience between us, but we have all trained to the same standard," Garry says. "We believe we are the only amateur team in Europe doing formation aerobatics." A cornerstone of that training has been with RAF fighter flying instructors on courses organised by Anthony Hutton of The Squadron at North Weald, Essex, where the Aerostars are also based. "They don't come any better

than these RAF pilots," says Mark. "We have even had a Red Arrows pilot training us." Having low total hours is not a problem for aerobatic pilots, he insists: "Most people with 300 hours will have been sitting quietly flying between one cup of tea and the next, but our team members with PPLs have spent most of their time in formation aerobatics, much of it at the controls of a Yak."

Gene sums up what makes a first-class aerobatic pilot: "Discipline and consistency in flying and the ability to complete the same precise routine time and time again." Before forming the Aerostars, the five pilots competed against one another in air races but decided they wanted something more challenging. Did they all fly smoothly when they started work on their display last winter? There is a great guffaw of laughter. "There was a steep learning curve!" admits Jeff. But they



Ground plan: "Going through the motions" on foot is vital

YAK-52

Engine: Ten-litre, nine-cylinder supercharged 360hp Ivchenko radial.
Performance: Never-exceed speed 270mph; cruising speed 150mph. G-limits: +7 to -5.
Fuel consumption: In cruise, 13 gallons per hour; aerobatics, 20-plus gallons per hour.
Price: £37,000-£40,000. About £150 an hour to fly.

all have great confidence in each other. With day jobs and families, finding time to practise is always a problem. "We'll never rival the Red Arrows," says Mark. "We compromise between what looks impressive and what is achievable with a limited amount of practice. This sort of flying is very satisfying."

Next year, the five Aerostars plan to become seven, with the addition of two very experienced amateur pilots, Mark Jefferies, a former British aerobatic champion, and Richard "Fred" Bassett. They, too, will join the soft-shoe shuffle rehearsals before every formation flight. The "dance" routine may look zany but it is a major element of safe precision flying. Andy Hammond sums up the point of it all as he prepares to step out towards the clouds: "Rule One: Do not crash. Rule Two: Always obey Rule One!"

Build your own plane in safety

Deaths such as John Denver's are rare accidents, reports Eve-Ann Prentice

Speculation about the air crash which killed John Denver has focused attention on the safety of home-made aircraft such as the one the singer was flying when he nosedived into California's Monterey Bay. The futuristic, Y-shaped Long-EZ was an upmarket version of the sort of plane put together by thousands of enthusiasts in backyards and garages. Costing from as little as £3,000, home-built aircraft are an increasingly popular option for people who no longer see flying as the preserve of the super-rich. There are around 1,200 home-built planes licensed to fly in this

country and around 170 British models to choose from. Across the world there are about 500 types of home-made plane and one of the most popular is the British-designed Europa, costing £45,000-£50,000. "The quickest kits can take about three months — if you are not working," says Anthony Preston of the Popular Flying Association, the organisation which inspects home-built aircraft on behalf of the Civil Aviation Authority, to which most home-build pilots belong. "Against that, three to five years is typical and some of them are a labour of love which goes on for 20 years or more."



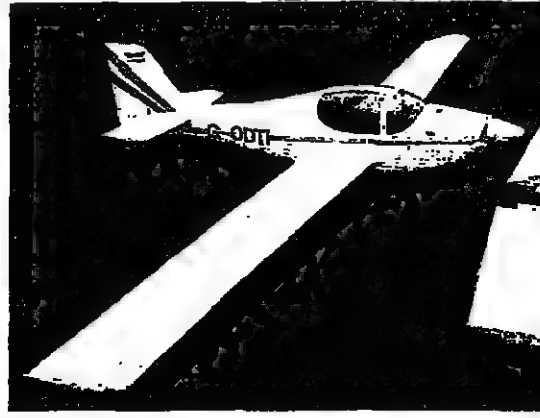
Kai Christensen's Opus 3, based on Bert Rutan's Long-EZ design, left, and the latest model from the British-designed Europa

Michael Fopp, director of the RAF Museum at Hendon, has been making his own Lance Air aeroplane for the past six years: "The Wright brothers built their own aeroplane, so I feel I am in good company. People who build their own aircraft are the opposite to what most people think, we are very meticulous."

Of the home-built aircraft flying in Britain, 18 are Long-EZs and none has been involved in a serious accident. More than 22,000 home-built planes are registered with the FAA in America, including around 1,000 Long-EZs. Although it is possible to buy a kit or plans and materials for a home-made plane for as little as £3,000, they generally cost £10,000-£15,000 and can be as much as £30,000, still generally cheaper than factory-built light planes such as Cessnas and Pipers. There are nearly twice as many

home-built aircraft flying in America than there were a decade ago, and the number of home-builts in Britain has increased by a third every year since 1991, says the PFA. The Long-EZ, regarded as one of the safest and most successful of the home-made planes, was designed in 1979 by Bert Rutan. Denver's was built in Houston, Texas in 1987 and had changed hands four times before the singer bought it from Van Snow, a

veterinary surgeon. Mr Snow, who sold the aircraft for \$56,000 (£35,000), had flown it for 700 hours without incident. Long-EZs are made from plans and templates which are no longer for sale, although versions of the aircraft are still being built by enthusiasts using existing plans. Like other home-built aircraft, they undergo rigorous tests at least twice during construction before being allowed to fly. In Britain,



checks are carried out by one of the PFA's 320 inspectors or the CAA itself. Statistics indicate that flying is becoming safer. In America, there are half the number of accidents involving non-airline planes than there were 10 years ago. "There are 622,000 pilots active now in the US," says Drew Stokete of the International Aircraft Owners and Pilots' Association. "Of all accidents, including fender benders, there were 9,257 in 1947 compared with about 1,800 last year."

In Britain, the CAA says, an average of 14 people have been killed annually in light aircraft crashes in the past 10 years. Since 1987, 65 people have been killed in airliners and other public transport aircraft. But flying is still by far the safest way to travel — the risk of being killed as an airline passenger is one in ten million, the same as the chance of being killed by lightning. From the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s, more than 21,000 people were killed in car crashes in Britain, compared with 103 who died in UK airline accidents.

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Sara McConnell finds new homeowners want value for money, not a shoebox with a smart address

First-timers shun starter homes

First-time buyers borrowed more and spent more on their homes last month, continuing to shun the studios and one-bedroom flats that were eagerly snapped up by the previous generation in the housing boom of the 1980s.

Hopes that rising house prices would force first-time buyers back to the cheapest homes appear to have been dashed in many areas, with estate agents across the country saying they "can't give them away". As house prices begin to slacken, agents are predicting the death of the traditional studio market.

According to the latest figures from the Halifax, prices paid by first-time buyers rose by 1.4 per cent last month, dwarfing the almost static overall monthly price rise of 0.5 per cent. The average price paid by first-time buyers was £50,362, bought on a loan of £45,234. This represents 88.9 per cent of the property's value, the highest since December last year.

Cheap mortgage money and competitive fixed-rate deals are insulating them from the prospect of more interest rate rises, says Stuart Tullah of Collins Sons and Harvey, the Birmingham estate agent.

He says: "Interest rates are up but historically they are still reasonably low. First-time buyers have come back to the market because there is the perception that house prices are rising and will continue to rise."

But cheap mortgage deals are bringing larger, more expensive properties within the reach of many who would have been able to afford only a small starter home in the late 1980s when house prices were rising sharply.

Such "leapfrogging" has hit areas outside London and the South East hardest because house prices have not risen sharply enough to force people back to studios. Many of the homeowners who bought them are still trapped in negative equity and have been forced to let them to get on with their lives.

Julie Westby of Vale Estates in Stockport says: "One-bedroom flats



Out West on location — not in the studio

Ben Ash and Sarah Wilkinson had a choice when they decided to buy their first home (Sara McConnell writes). Either they bought a studio or tiny one-bedroom flat in desirable Blackheath, southeast London, or moved to slightly less fashionable West Norwood and bought a spacious two-bedroom flat for the same £76,000 price.

They chose West Norwood. "We looked in Blackheath but we couldn't afford much more than a studio. We wanted two bedrooms and a garden," says Mr Ash. The couple's hunt for a

mortgage has not been all plain sailing. They stopped dealing with one broker who advertised as a first-time buyer specialist.

He added: "We got the impression he was ramming endowments down our throats and got a bit sick of it." Another adviser gave good advice but charged high fees to prospective buyers who did not take income-protection insurance. Now they are awaiting confirmation of two possible deals from a third adviser.

Mr Ash and Ms Wilkinson are having second thoughts about fixing their rate after

rumours that the Government was keen on signing up to a European single currency. "I believe we will be heavily influenced by the single currency even if we don't go in", says Mr Ash. "If interest rates are 4 per cent in three years we'll be caught". Originally they were considering a three-year fixed rate from the Nationwide at 7.05 per cent with no penalty for leaving when the three years are up. Now they are weighing this up against a discount of 1 per cent over three years on Nationwide's standard rate, now 8.1 per cent.

and studios are a nightmare. We had one on at £28,000 in a good area of south Manchester but we couldn't give it away at £20,000. People don't want to live in studios". House prices in the North West rose by just 0.9 per cent in the

third quarter of this year, according to the Halifax.

Stuart Tullah reports a similar picture in Birmingham, where one-bedroom cottages and starter homes on 1980s estates are hanging heavy. "People's incomes are grow-

ing and they think they might as well move a bit further out and spend a little more. Instead of a small terrace in the inner city at £35,000 they go for a three-bed semi in Edingorton or Acocks Green for £50,000 to £55,000." The West

Midlands saw a fall of 0.3 per cent in the last quarter.

Even in London and the South East, where prices have risen most sharply, the market for studios is patchy at best. Glenn Bates of Nicholsons in Epping, Essex, re-

ports some interest in previously despised one-bedroom houses and flats on 1980s starter estates. First-time buyers were able to bypass cheap homes during the recession but now some are coming back. "A shortage of good properties is also leading to a larger price difference between one and two-bedroom homes, forcing some buyers back to the smallest flats."

In London, many buyers who cannot afford anything bigger than a studio in their first choice of area are choosing to move further out rather than squish themselves into a tiny space with the possibility that they may never be able to sell.

Ron Steiner of Plaza Estates, the North London agent, says: "The studio market died in the recession and it's dead now. People are petrified of being stuck, a prisoner in their own home."

UK buyers who cannot afford the £150,000 it costs for even a one-bedroom flat in choice areas such as St John's Wood are colonising surrounding areas like Willesden and Brondesbury. Prices in Greater London slackened slightly over the last quarter, further depressing demand at the lowest end of the market.

Hilary Wade, of Winkworths, agrees: "People are looking for space and they'll compromise on area. If they start looking at Islington they will go to Hackney or even King's Cross". Developers are building few studios as there is little demand for them, she adds.

The main demand for studios in London is from investors, many foreign, buying them to rent out, or from people living in London during the week and looking for a pied à terre.

The latter are the main takers for the expensive broom cupboards which periodically hit the headlines, according to Mr Steiner. He has recently sold a small studio to a senior partner in a firm of solicitors who needed to be in London a couple of days a week. Other takers could be 40 to 50-year-old divorcees looking for something small and central.

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lock-in
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If you are a first-time buyer, you can be certain of being on every list for the best mortgage deals. You will be in a strong bargaining position with lenders who are desperate to entice first-timers, particularly as the market shows signs of slackening.

Almost all first-time buyers are being advised to sign up to fixed rates, discounts or other special deals in spite of the possibility that early entry into a single currency could force interest rates down.

Mortgage advisers say falling five-year fixed rates are some of the cheapest ever. The Halifax last week joined its rivals in cutting its five-year fixed rates for anyone moving house including first-time buyers. Those with a 25 per cent deposit will pay 6.45 per cent and those with between 5 per cent and 25 per cent to put down will pay 6.85 per cent.

But both deals will lock you in with the Halifax for another year and a half after the fixed-rate term has ended, on pain of hefty penalties. Philip Cartwright of London & Country Mortgages says first-time buyers in particular need to check lock-in clauses on fixed rates and discounts carefully. "If you think you will move in three to five years get a three-year fixed rate. If you could move in two, a two-year fix. Don't be trapped by extended redemption penalties."

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Kung-fu kick catches shares

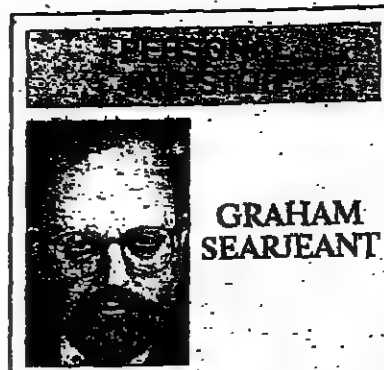
Hong Kong it was that finally sent a share price tremor big enough to reach the West. The shockwaves from a local crisis rattled crutcher and chimney pots in London, New York, Frankfurt and Tokyo.

Only Hong Kong of the Asian markets could do this, as we learnt in August when Western investors merely had to roll up their trouser legs to withstand a tidal wave from imploding markets in Malaysia, Thailand and other "tiger" nations. The dire Tokyo market, though many times bigger, has not been this infectious.

Links are more direct. HSBC, the old Hongkong Bank that owns Midland, is the most valuable stock in both the Hang Seng index, out there and London's FTSE-100. The Hang Seng takes its name from the Hong Kong Chinese bank that HSBC so profitably rescued in a panic long ago. Cable & Wireless, Standard Chartered and Incheape all depend on market conditions there. The city's financial centre is international, still dominated by Western groups. And although Hong Kong is an emerging market for Chinese stocks, its own corporate base is mature. Shares in the index were rated lower than in London or New York, even though the

The stock market is also notoriously volatile, as yesterday's rebound reminded us. In October 1987, when New York's Dow Jones average plummeted nearly a third, the Hang Seng shed half its value. The Tiananmen Square massacre cost it 37 per cent. Back in 1981, when political confidence evaporated, Hong Kong shares shed 40 per cent in three months, starting a 17-month bear market that eroded 60 per cent of value.

The economy and shares did not spring back until Hong Kong fixed its dollar to America's to bolster confidence. This link has seen the place through a political minefield at modest economic cost and acquired a greater status that it now deserves. Hong Kong leaders, who



GRAHAM SEARJEANT

advised Malaysia not to buck the markets, are stripped for battle to defend the parity, whatever the cost.

That is fine if a show of force does the trick. The cost could be high if interest rates stay high long enough to puncture the bloated property market, on whose fortunes so much of Hong Kong depends. And Hong Kong's currency is now overvalued for trade, if only because rivals have devalued.

Why not avoid all this by floating the currency first? If a measure taken to protect the economy from past political instability becomes the source of present instability, it should go. But Hong Kong has big reserves, no debts, a sound budget and built-in monetary discipline. Even George Soros, Malaysia's bogeyman, reckoned Hong Kong should succeed where shakier economies failed and argued that a stable currency was vital to a financial centre. For better or worse, Hong Kong seems to agree.

China, stung by a 10 per cent first-day discount on the flotation of China Telecom, is prepared to back the Hong Kong markets. As in any market, discriminating bargain-hunters should look out for high-class stocks innocently caught up in the mess. After the setback, the Hang Seng is down a third from its August peak.

Having triggered latent doubts, Hong Kong's affairs now scarcely matter for

Western stock markets. Only the lateness of dollar strength, along with sterling's milder buoyancy, features in the general rethink. Frankfurt was the other main candidate to trigger a general slide. Share prices had already lost momentum there and interest rates are on the way up to converge with the likely rate on a euro that will start softer than the mark, and to sustain the mark/euro in the face of the dollar. America too, expects some modest rise in short-term interest rates for domestic reasons, though US monetary policy is now so sensitive that rates are less likely to rise if the New York stock market dramatically loses its exuberance.

Overvaluation is the key worry in New York and in London, as discussed here last week. Prices have been chased too far this year. That was why the otherwise meaningless tenth anniversary of the 1987 crash made investors so nervous when economies are sound.

Share prices have broken modestly, upsetting the optimistic upward momentum. So why should investors buy markets that already looked too highly rated after six years plus of economic upswing? Ratings of 26 times earnings in New York and 20 times in London owe something to the secular fall in inflation and long-term interest rates. But they presume that lots of companies can keep annual earnings growth near 10 per cent in this climate. The case is unproven. The benefit of the doubt may now be withdrawn.

In contrast to Hong Kong, one good sign is that big investors are switching into bonds rather than cash, even though UK money rates are attractive. This implies that they are looking for a sub-1987 correction in share prices, not a downturn in the investment cycle. If London shares fell as much as 8 per cent and Wall Street about twice as much, that might be the end of it, leaving decent profits on shares in 1997. If that has to happen, the sooner the better.

Checks in the post deliver extra

Investors hunting the best home for their money in a period of relatively low interest rates are turning to postal accounts in search of worthwhile returns.

About 46 banks and building societies now offer such accounts, many of them with gross rates two percentage points more than rates paid on branch-based accounts. This is because postal accounts are much cheaper to administer.

Bristol & West, the current market leader according to Moneyfacts, the money information service, offers a rate of 7.85 per cent on a deposit of £50,000 for its 30-day account. This is more than two points higher than the 5.15 per cent offered by the Halifax's branch-based service for the same amount. Nearly ten

years after Cheltenham & Gloucester launched the service, postal accounts are becoming increasingly popular with busy professionals who do not have time to visit a branch as well as the house-bound and those who cannot get to their bank because they live out of town.

Postal account deposits usually range from £5,000 to £10,000. But some banks and building societies such as the Royal Bank of Scotland now accept deposits of £500. Sainsbury and Tesco are making aggressive inroads into the savings market by offering high rates of interest on accounts with balances of just £1. Both supermarkets offer 6.5 per cent on an instant-access account, although Tesco imposes restric-

tions on the amount that customers are allowed to withdraw.

Most societies offer 24-hour turnaround on transactions and a growing number of banks and building societies are now offering postal account holders a telephone service as well. These include Bradford & Bingley, Bank of Scotland, Cheltenham & Gloucester, Legal & General and Scottish Widows.

For those who can tie up their money for longer, there are a range of 30-day, 60-day and 90-day notice accounts. The longer the notice, the higher the rate of interest. Early withdrawals incur penalties. Postal accounts are not for impulse buyers. Even holders of instant access accounts have to wait for their

mail to arrive. James Higgins, of Chamberlain de Broe, the financial adviser, said: "Postal accounts are for the older, more organised person; for the serious investor who plans ahead and is maybe saving up for a single purchase."

For deposits of £1,000, Moneyfacts recommends the First National 90-day account which offers a rate of 7.1 per cent. The Scottish Widows bank has a 60-day account which offers 6.8 per cent on £1,000.

For balances of £10,000, Bristol & West is offering 7.65 per cent on its 30-day account. Alliance & Leicester and First National offer 7.5 per cent on instant-access accounts for the same balance.

SUSAN EMMETT

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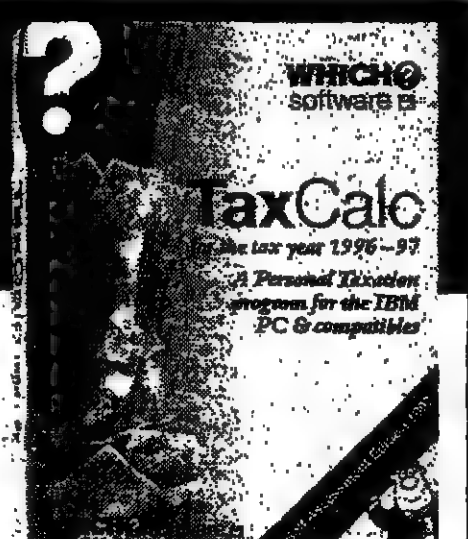
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Perhaps a little too cosy for comfort

In principle, best-buy panels from which independent financial advisers pick carefully vetted products for their customers are a very good idea. The IFA maintains a good relationship with the top providers in the industry, and the customer can benefit from the hours of research into products that the financial adviser has put in on his behalf.

There is, however, the small matter of commission. A report from the Personal Investment Authority, the investors' watchdog, this week suggests that some product providers are effectively "buying" their way on to such panels by offering higher commission rates than rivals.

It also suggests that best-buy panels are often too small to provide a full range of options for customers. Of course, not all IFAs allow their judgment to be clouded by



COMMENT
MARIANNE CURPHEY
Personal Finance
Deputy Editor

commission. However, many began their careers in large life companies and will be steeped in the sales culture. They may find it difficult to make the switch from agent to adviser.

Most IFA firms are small businesses: many of them employ fewer than 50 people and some struggle from time to time with cashflow problems. The temptation to sell a product with high initial commission rather than opt for something better, but cheaper, for the customer,

must be great when the bills are building up.

At stake is the trust between adviser and customer. The very reason people visit IFAs is that they want to believe they are dealing with an adviser who will recommend a product that is tailor-made for their requirements.

Attempts to standardise commission have failed once already, so this is an unlikely solution. Unit trust companies recognise the problem but are reluctant to rock the

boat. It is a matter that NewRo, the new regulator, must address with some urgency when it is launched next week.

One for the boys

VIRGIN DIRECT'S new current account mortgage, One, may have an appeal for sophisticated investors who venture into the choppy waters of borrowing to invest in the hope of earning a higher return than the debt's interest rate.

During the flotation of Norwich Union thousands of these investors took out bank and credit card loans to fund applications for extra shares. Virgin One's 8.2 per cent interest rate is lower than many personal or credit card rates.

This may make it a hit for reasons other than those put forward by its management just over a week ago.

Skipton case ends in tiers

Clare Stewart reports on a leaflet promoting higher interest rates that was ruled to have misled savers

Skipton Building Society has been rapped over the knuckles by the Advertising Standards Authority for a leaflet promoting its High Street Savings account.

The ASA upheld a complaint that claims about "new higher rates" that appeared in the leaflet were misleading because not all interest rates had increased and one had, in fact, gone down.

In its defence, the Skipton said that the leaflet had not claimed "that all rates were higher, but that the new investment bands now offered higher rates for new investors". The society also said that it had not received any complaints directly from customers.

Changes to the instant access account meant that instead of offering three levels of interest, six levels were now available. A new investor who had more than £5,000 to invest would bene-

fit from the increased rate available, said the Skipton.

However, the ASA was unconvinced by the Skipton's argument and has asked it to withdraw the leaflet.

Also left confused by the changes to the instant access account and the lower rate offered was Vicky Shaw, a Skipton customer from Langholm, Dumfriesshire.

Mrs Shaw opened her High Street account in April with an investment of £2,000. The interest rate was 4 per cent gross and Mrs Shaw was told that if the balance fell below £2,000 the account would be closed automatically as part of the building society's anti-carpetbagging measures.

Last week Mrs Shaw phoned her local branch to check the current rate of

interest on the account, given the increases in base rates between April and October.

She was told that the interest rate had in fact gone down and that her money was now earning 3.2 per cent gross because the account had been "retired". To earn more than 4 per cent she would have to increase the balance in the account.

The rate offered is, says Robert Shaw, "ridiculous in this climate". The Shaws have topped up the account to move into the next interest tier, and for the time being they are retaining the account because the local branch is convenient.

However, the Shaws remain unimpressed by the Skipton offer. "It is poor, particularly when they keep spouting about the advan-

tages of mutuality," said Mr Shaw.

The High Street account currently offers rates of 3 per cent for the minimum investment of £2,000, rising to 6.25 per cent on deposits of £50,000 and above.

John Dawson, secretary and general manager of the Skipton Building Society, said that the reduction in rate for the lowest tier was part of the society's move to keep out carpetbaggers.

Mr Dawson said: "We would love not to have this

problem because the volume of new accounts being opened has so disrupted the service we can offer.

"We have tried to minimise the impact by restricting the tier affected. We are keeping rates under review because we appreciate there are existing customers affected by it."

Together with the condition of maintaining a minimum balance of £2,000, Skipton's further measure against opportunist investors has been to stipulate that new investors putting in less than £5,000 initially have to pay £25 to the NSPCC.

Donations to the children's charity have already topped the £300,000 mark.



Skipton talks of higher rates but Vicky Shaw and husband Robert lost out under "retiring"

Sit tight or change track

The FTSE 100 index has had a rough ride this week and investors' nerves have been severely tested. Uncertainty over the UK's intentions towards European monetary union, the introduction of the new order-driven trading system for share dealing, and uncertainty in world markets saw UK share prices extremely volatile. The FTSE 100 opened this week at 5,271.1 and closed at 4,970.2.

Investors who hold index-tracking funds have watched as some of the biggest names in blue-chip stocks fell heavily on Thursday as the collapse in the Hong Kong market spread across the rest of the world. Particularly hard hit have been groups with a large exposure to the Far East including HSBC, which slid 9 per cent on Thursday.

Unlike actively managed investments, tracker funds do not switch in and out of stocks, but remain weighted in line with the particular index. Rebalancing of the portfolio is prompted only by very large price movements. Most FTSE 100 tracker funds follow all of the 100 companies and so

shadow the sort of share price movements seen this week. The advice to those who already have an index tracker is to sit tight and take a five-year view, according to Tony Wood, marketing director of Virgin Direct, which offers a UK Equity Index Tracker Fund investing in all the FTSE 100 share companies. He said: "Successful investors sit through short-term blips."

Rick Lachille, head of quantitative investments at Gartmore, which runs its own All Share index tracker plus a FTSE 100 tracker for NewWest, believes initial volatility accompanied the introduction of order-driven trading this week, but the system should soon "settle down".

"Tracker funds are a sensible way of investing," said Ian Milward from Chase de Vere, independent financial advisers, "but the UK market has had a good run, and investors may want to diversify into other markets if most of their other investments are UK-based."

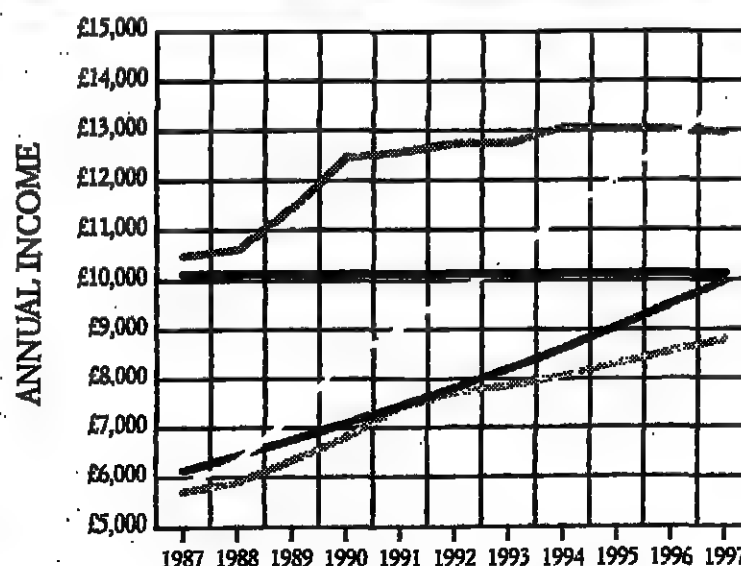
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FT Quarterly Review of Personal Finance
27 - 28 January 1995

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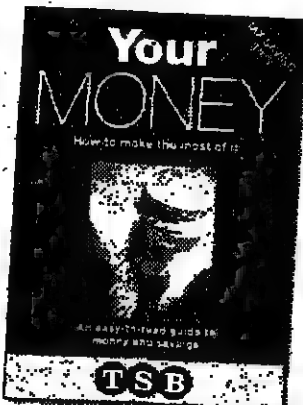


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Insuring your health has particular merits and difficulties for the self-employed, says John Givens

Taking cover for trouble and strife



Clive Tanner, a graphic designer, took on more than a wife when he married 29-year-old office administrator Dee Town in June — he also splashed out on critical illness insurance and accident protection cover to help to pay the bills if accident or serious illness prevented him from working (Jon Givens writes).

The 36-year-old businessman, a partner in Creative Natives, a Bristol design house, decided in the summer that the time had come to make sure he had some protection after being self-employed for more than three years. He looked carefully at the schemes available before opting for a Black Horse Life Living Cover Plan, a critical illness policy which pays out a lump sum if he contracts one of the serious illnesses specified. He also took out accident protection cover that also pays out a lump sum if he suffers one of the accidents specified, such as the loss of an eye or arm.

In spite of already making some provision to provide an income if he is too ill to work, Clive is now looking to complete the cover by taking out permanent health insurance (PHI), which will pay up to 60 per cent of his normal monthly income while he is unable to carry on his business because of accident, injury or illness. He said that marriage made him realise more than ever the importance of making sure he could pay the bills if he was incapacitated and unable to work. "Having the responsibility of a family has made me realise that I should take out a policy to protect my income if anything prevents me from working. I like playing football and it is always at the back of my mind that I could get injured. But knowing I have some cover to pay the bills if something happens helps me enjoy it more."

Soloists need to play it safe

Being self-employed offers many attractions, but the prospect of being unable to work and earn an income is not one of them.

If you are one of the millions employed by a company offering a decent sick pay scheme, the chances are that you have little to worry about unless struck down by illness or accident for more than a year, after which your sickness benefits might come to an end.

However, when you work for yourself, the fear of being unable to play your trade will be at the back of your mind. If the worst happens and you cannot work because of illness or injury, the bill stops ringing.

However, Britain's 3.5 million self-employed workers do have another option — insurance cover. Insuring your income by taking out a permanent health insurance (PHI) policy is easier than you may think, although being self-employed can cause complications.

According to Allied Dunbar, 60 per cent of PHI policies issued to individuals are held by self-employed people.

PHI insures part of your normal income, usually up to 60 per cent of gross monthly earnings, if you cannot carry on your normal occupation because of illness, accident or injury.

The monthly cost of policies depends on the deferred period, which sets out how long the policyholder needs to be unable to work before the monthly benefit begins. Com-



panies offering PHI typically give quotes based on one, three, six and 12 months, with the premium being less the longer the deferred period.

Premiums also differ considerably from company to company and depend on a number of factors, such as age, occupation, state of health, family history and whether the benefits are fixed or go up with inflation during the policy's life.

The problem that the self-employed often have with PHI is proving what their earnings were just before making a claim. This is particularly so for those who have only just set up a business.

To make sure that policyholders do not insure themselves for more than their actual earnings — and would therefore be better off claiming rather than working — insurers check very closely a claimant's position before paying benefits.

Self-employed people have to prove recent net relevant earnings — that is profits from the business after all legitimate expenses have been deducted.

However, a new trader will probably spend the first few months earning very little

while trying to develop business, so, if a claim came during this period, the underwriter of a PHI policy might argue that the benefits agreed to should be calculated as a percentage of actual earnings rather than of the amount a self-employed worker expects after becoming established.

In this situation, some insurers will accept your most recent employed income as a benchmark if you have recently left a company to go it alone, although, as with many insurance claims, you can never be sure what the underwriter's reaction will be until you claim.

To be on the safe side, you should ask PHI providers to

outline their stance on newly self-employed people making claims before you buy a policy and ask for confirmation of what they tell you in writing.

PHI can be as cheap or as expensive as you want it to be, depending on how soon after you become incapacitated you want the benefits to begin.

If you have savings set aside and you know you can continue to pay the mortgage and household bills while you are ill and not earning an income, you should defer benefits for as long as you can afford to, because the PHI premiums fall dramatically.

On the other hand, if every penny you had has been pumped into your new business and you will need income as quickly as possible if forced to stop working, you will need a policy with the minimum deferred period of one month.

Deferring benefits for as long as possible makes PHI affordable for most people, although short deferred peri-

ods can mean the monthly premiums look frightening.

According to Allied Dunbar, a 35-year-old non-smoking man wanting indexed-linked benefits of £25,000 a year, based on normal net relevant earnings of £30,000 a year, would have to pay £62.23 a month for a policy with a 12-month deferred period.

However, if he needs a policy paying out after three months' incapacity, the monthly premium leaps to £178.23 — more than £2,100 a year.

The same cover fixed for the policy's life, rather than index-linked, is cheaper, at £44.73 for a 12-month deferral of benefits and £131.23 for three-month deferral, although the long-term sick risk seen by their income eroded over time by inflation.

Although the costs can seem prohibitive, PHI is rapidly becoming an insurance that more and more people — particularly the self-employed —

are realising they cannot do without, especially if supporting a spouse and children.

Peter Kelly, Allied Dunbar's protection marketing director, says that PHI providers are becoming more experienced at dealing with the self-employed and allaying fears of claims being rejected or downgraded.

He said: "If someone is newly self-employed and likely to earn very little in the early days, we will basically come to some agreement about the earnings expectations of the insured and refer back to a recent salary for the purposes of a claim if necessary. We always look at a claim and try to find reasons to pay it rather than reasons not to, and most reputable insurers will attempt to honour 100 per cent of claims." Allied Dunbar research shows that customers rank the security of a company and its record of paying legitimate claims as the key measures of an insurer, with the cost of policies down in seventh place.

The Chancellor has announced that there will be changes to the tax regime of PEPs with effect from 01.04.98. Until this date PEPs remain tax free. After this date it may no longer be possible to contribute your investment into a PEP. Full details of the Revised Savings Account (RSA) and details for transferring over RSAs have yet to be clarified. You should contact your independent financial adviser if you have any doubts. The price of investments and the income from them can go down as well as up, you may not get back as much as you invest. Past performance is not necessarily a guide to future performance. M&G do not offer advice or make any recommendations regarding investment — we only promote the products and services of the M&G investing group. Issued by M&G Securities Limited (Regulated by the Financial Services Authority). Registered Address: 3 Market Court, Great Tower Street, London EC3R 7DP. Registered No: 00776

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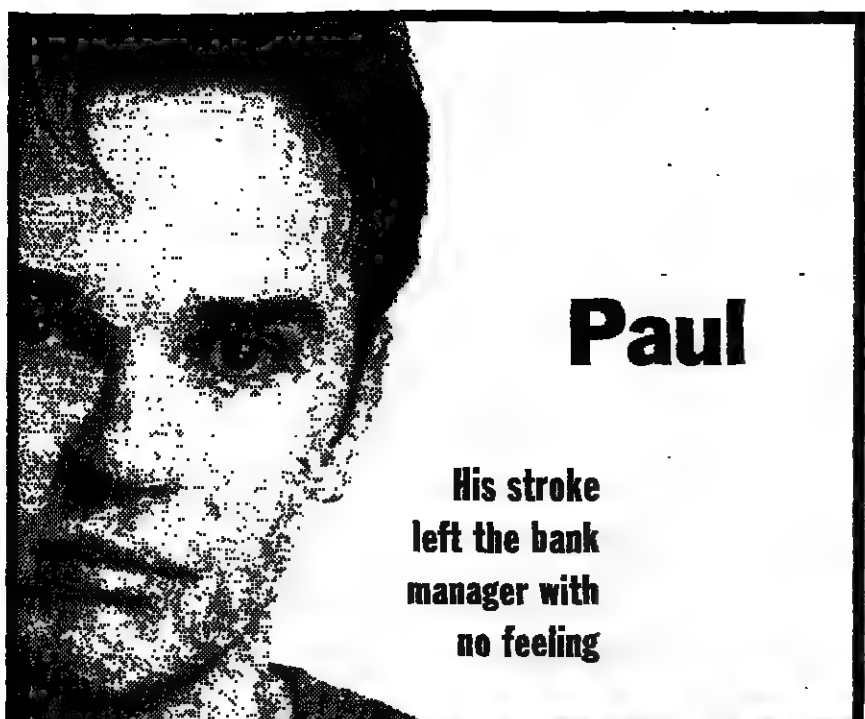


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Beale Dobie

Gavin Lumsden on a dispute over permanent health cover



Dr Nick Howarth, with his dog Jake, at home reading in a special chair developed to ease the symptoms of back pain sufferers like himself

A group of doctors and dentists have launched a campaign against the Medical Sickness Society, a permanent health insurer they claim is terminating policies of long-term claimants through the misuse of secretly filmed video evidence. They allege that MSS is asking claimants to describe their own symptoms rather than relying on the independent evidence of medical experts. They say it has been known them to pay private detectives to film claimants doing things that are supposedly contradictory to the symptoms they have described. One doctor claims he was followed by private detectives in a car with blacked-out windows and was posted a heavy package by the company that wanted to see if he could pick it up, a claim vigorously denied by MSS.

The doctors and dentists complain that the policies are terminated on the advice of a medical officer who never examines them directly but simply relies on the video evidence. In spite of numerous requests, they say the company refuses to disclose the video evidence. MSS, a subsidiary of Wesleyan Assurance, which has seen the costs of claims rocket in recent years, says that it is merely defending itself against potential fraud and denies it is systematically targeting long-term cases. However, Dr Nick Howarth, a doctor in Nuneaton, Warwickshire, is taking MSS to an independent arbitrator after the insurer stopped its payments to him after just four months. Dr Howarth, 47, who took out his PHI policy with MSS in 1978, had to stop work in January 1996 when he had spondylosis diagnosed. This condition

Doctors seek cure for insurance ills

means he develops a painful neck and loses fine control of his fingers if he stands upright for long periods. He is currently taking morphine for pain relief. He started claiming in April, but in September 1996 he says he was told by MSS that it had obtained video evidence of him lifting heavy weights. It then demanded he repay the money. Dr Howarth said: "They say they have video evidence of my mobility. I've never denied that I am mobile. The point is I can't stand still for too long and I am taking strong painkillers, and I can't work as a GP when I am on them. I told them I was playing golf for exercise to stop my muscles wasting."

A 59-year-old dentist in Leeds, who did not want to be named, said the MSS had contributed to the break-up of his marriage. He developed fibromyalgia and arthritis, which leaves his hands, particularly his thumbs, extremely painful. This prevents him from holding instruments such as drills, which are essential for his job. After 30 years of paying premiums on his MSS policy he started to claim in September 1994. Fourteen months later MSS told him it had evidence of him doing DIY work. In spite of the report from an eminent expert in rheumatology at the University of Leeds confirming his condition, MSS stopped his payments.

totally stressed. If there are any stresses in your marriage it just destroys it."

Another dentist in Northern Ireland, who suffers back pain after a spinal injury, complains that MSS asked for five orthopaedic reports in ten months. He then replied to a letter from the company saying there was no change in his condition. The company accused him of exaggerating his claim, even though he says he never saw any of the reports, and backed this up with video evidence it claimed it had of him doing physical exercise.

Les Dilley, the MSS claims manager at the centre of all these cases, denied the company was doing anything wrong. "If a claimant describes what they can do in detail and if we then obtain consistent direct observation that contradicts what they have said, what do you expect me to do?"

Mr Dilley said secret filming, or "direct observation" as he termed it, was used in only a small number of the 2000 claims dealt with each year.

The company, he said, usually acted on comments from doctors and occasional anonymous tip-offs but only terminated a policy if there was a severe inconsistency with a previous medical report. He insisted that the footage was never edited and was taken over a long period of time. It was not revealed to claimants because it could result in a time-wasting argument about what individuals did or did not do on specific days. If claimants really wanted to see the evidence they could take the company to court, he said.

Dr Howarth may be contacted by e-mail on 101740.1165@compuserve.com.

Virgin One puts flexible loans in spotlight

The launch of Virgin One, a new mortgage and current account, by Richard Branson's Virgin Direct, has highlighted the growth in the number of new "flexible mortgages" which lenders are offering.

These products are designed to free homeowners from the rigid payment schedules which lenders normally impose. They are intended to appeal to people who can pay off sections of their mortgage from time to time with lump sums: who have a good salary but need to borrow heavily on occasions; or who are self-employed and whose cash-flow varies.

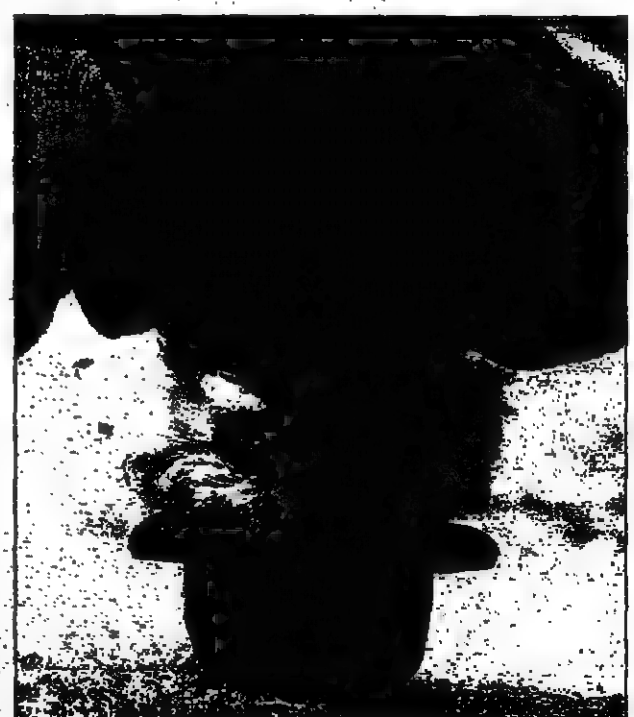
This latter type of customer would find the option to take mortgage payment holidays particularly

Lenders are moving to meet demand for loans for customers with 90s lifestyles, says Marianne Curphey

slack business periods. Bank of Scotland and Mortgage Trust already offers mortgages where payments can be varied. Virgin One, a joint venture between Virgin Direct and the Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS), is different because it requires customers to pay their salary into the account as well.

Moneyfacts, the money information service, points out that the rates of interest Virgin One is charging are "higher than most flexible mortgages, many of which are also offering very attractive incentives".

Vicki Burn, Moneyfacts editor, said: "Sainsbury's Bank's Options Mortgage rate can be as low as 7.45 per cent for a loan up to 75 per cent of value and they also give £400 towards legal costs. Stroud & Swindon Building Society's Flexible Mortgage has a standard variable rate of 8.30 per cent and offers a cash rebate of up to 3 per cent, plus free valuation and free legal costs. Even RBS, Virgin's partner, charges only 7.7 per cent on its Flexible Choice and gives free unemployment insurance for



Richard Branson is turning the loans market upside down

four years although it has no chequebook facility."

Simon Tyler, managing director of Chase De Vere Mortgage Management, says the ideal flexible mortgage customer would be in their forties with substantial equity in their home and with enough discipline to borrow without getting into trouble.

He said: "This is not a mortgage for first-time buyers who can get a cheap discount or fixed rate and who need to know their outgoings will stay the same for the first few years. Flexible mortgages work on a variable rate so customers must recognise they could be hit by higher rates. They are only a good idea when rates are historically low."

It is also not worth switching mortgages if you have to pay redemption penalties," Chase De Vere's own product, the Adaptable Lifestyle Mortgage which is backed by Mortgage Trust, allows payment holidays and early repayment and currently has an interest rate of 8.31 per cent. Mortgage Trust also has a

Cost

"We'll have none of that"

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Seeking a voice for 'Sids' share interests



Angela Knight wants to see a Special Investor Forum to protect the interests of an army of small-scale traders

Angela Knight, former Conservative minister and head of the Association of Private Client Investment Managers and Stockbrokers, is calling for the formation of a Private Investor Forum to protect the interests of the 18 million Sids in this country.

As development on the Stock Exchange gathers speed, there are growing concerns that the voice of private investors is not being heard. Reforms, such as the introduction of the electronic order book this week, and the advent this year of Crest, the computer-driven settlement system, have been made to suit the needs of international institutions, she believes.

"Private investors get thought of as an add-on, not from malice, of course, but because all the thinking is done on behalf of the international institutional players. However, this is not acceptable because three quarters of the volume of business on the Stock Exchange comes from private investors, and 20 per cent of the value of that business. That's a lot of business and a lot of good business."

To counter this influence Ms Knight is aiming to bring together the Bank of England, financial services regulators, the Stock Exchange and investment companies to consider changes before they are made. On its agenda would be obvious pitfalls such as how the stock market will cope with the introduction of

Developments on the Stock Exchange raise real concerns about small investor needs, says Gavin Lumsden

Monday investors have no longer had to go to middlemen, known as market makers, who charged a fee for quoting a buy or sell price for shares in their hands. Instead buyers and sellers can now enter their orders directly into the order book, and already the gap between the buy and sell price on many shares has reduced.

However, most private investors are based from the order book because it will accept only trades above £4,000. Their "non-standard" deals continue to go through market-makers, now known as retail service providers. The good news is that the RSPs are committed to matching the spreads on the order book. The bad news is that they may start to charge extra handling fees to compensate for the loss of fee income from their institutional clients. This fear has become more acute since there are only four RSPs. One, BZW's Trade, is up for sale and another, Aiden Campbell, is a small player. This leaves Merrill Lynch and Kleinwort Benson, who could develop a lucrative duopoly, although they assured Ms Knight that they have no such plans.

There are other pressures driving up the cost for private investors. Two companies which provide links to Crest, BT Syntegra and Swift, are increasing their charges. Most stockbrokers have not passed these on to their clients but give warning that this could change.

the single European currency, and the end of the century when many computer systems are due to be reset or replaced. Other issues will be the extension of the order book, improvements in settlement time and including gills in Crest.

The Stock Exchange has already demonstrated the need for such a body. Days after its historic launch of the order book it announced it was establishing a special sub-committee to look at the issues for retail investors. This committee is prepared to change the rules governing how private investors interact with the order book if problems emerge.

Why should there be problems? In theory, the order book, officially known as Seta, the Stock Exchange Electronic Trading Service, should be good news for all investors, large and small. Since

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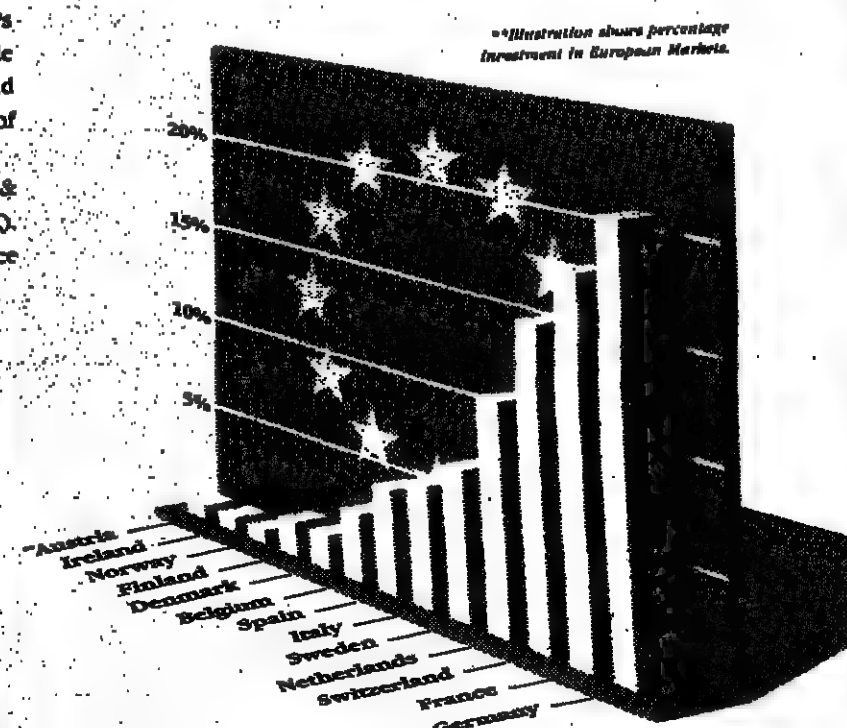
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The charitable work of Diana, Princess of Wales has spawned a host of spontaneous commemorative products

Diana gifts may not all help the needy

By this little teddy bear and 50p will go to Save the Bears Appeal. Spend £100 on this credit card and 25p will be given to the International Fund for the Preservation of Goldfish. A percentage of profits from these Christmas cards will go towards saving pine forests.

Marketing and charity make useful allies, and messages such as the above are a familiar tag to the promotion of diverse products and services, from lavatory paper to insurance.

Affinity cards where credit card spending is linked to a donation to a charity are a particularly common example, with a proliferation of worthy causes benefiting to the tune of thousands and occasionally millions of pounds.

The death of Diana, Princess of Wales, has given rise to a wide range of commemorative products being offered. While some manufacturers such as Wedgwood have held back, deeming it inappropriate to offer any such products, there are many others selling gifts which also promise a sales-linked donation to one of the Princess's favourite charities or her Memorial Fund.

However legitimate many such offers may be, the number of these promotions raises the question of how precisely donations are monitored. How, for example, does the purchaser of a commemorative set of coins or a mug know that the manufacturer is giving a percentage of profits to the charity, and not simply capitalising on public interest to boost sales?

The difficulty in this instance is complicated by the strength of response to the death of Diana. "A lot of people commenced production and fundraising in such a spontaneous way," said Kate Day, spokeswoman for the Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Fund. Technically, she says, a lot of companies may well be breaking the rules.

The Royal Mail says it is also keeping a watchful eye on some of the commemorative stamps that have been issued and offered for sale as collectors items in the UK, some of which claim to have been recognised by the Royal Mail. No official British stamps have been issued, and none will be, the spokesman says, until such permission may be granted by Earl Spencer.

The trustees of the memorial fund are currently assessing the many applications

Clare Stewart examines ways of finding out whether commemorative products will benefit the causes that were backed by the Princess

from companies wanting to sell products. "If a product is sold on the basis of a donation to the fund, that makes it a product endorsement and therefore requires the agreement of the trustees," Miss Day says.

Because of the rush of commemorative items, she added, not all companies now marketing products have gained that approval. "We are monitoring products we have not heard of," she says, as well as following up examples of product promotions making extravagant claims which have been brought to the fund's attention by the public.

Where companies are approved by the memorial fund, the terms of the arrangement are set out in a contractual agreement. The fund is also working on an official logo that can be used on products to denote approval.

In addition, products sold on this basis should clearly specify the nature of the donation and include the fund's charity number (064238). This is in line with codes of practice backed by groups such as the Advertising Standards Authority and the Direct Marketing Association.

Anyone planning to spend money on a product or service that is linked to any charitable donation should check the small print carefully so that they know exactly where their money is going.

The level of contribution should be clearly spelt out, together with the name of the charity or charities to benefit and says the ASA, "should not exaggerate the benefits to the charity or cause derived from purchase of the promoted product".

The code of practice also says consumers are entitled to ask companies to disclose how much money has been given to a particular cause through such a promotion.

If a product promotion of this sort is confusingly or misleadingly worded, it can

be referred to bodies such as the ASA, the Charity Commission or the specific charity named in the promotion.

Leading national charities such as the National Trust unsurprisingly keep a firm grip on product promotion. Under the Charities Act, says Margaret Hopper, corporate development manager of the National Trust, "all commercial deals have to have a contract".

Earlier this year, for example, Green Flag launched a vehicle rescue service offer for trust members, promising to give the trust 20 per cent of the sales price of either of the two policies being offered.

"This is clearly stated on all publicity and the company has to supply statements. We also have the right to audit their books," says Mrs Hopper. The trust also asks for a minimum guaranteed donation from companies in the first year, "so that the trust does not lose out by lending its name".

One of the most valuable such relationships for the trust has been the Affinity card issued by Midland Bank which over the past eight years has generated about £1.5 million.

Affinity cards have long been marketed as a painless way of supporting a good cause. An initial royalty is paid to the charity when the card is first issued, and then a proportion of the spend — usually 25p per £100 — donated by the issuing bank to the relevant cause.

The largest issuer in the UK is MBNA, with more than 500 associated group and charities, including the World Wide Fund for Nature and the Prince's Youth Business Trust. Among high street banks, for example, the Bank of Scotland has 85 affinity cards, with beneficiaries including the RSPCA, NSPCC and the Anthony Nolan Bone Marrow Trust.

Contractual agreements between a bank and charity mean that cardholders must be notified if the arrangement changes or lapses. Cardholders can also find out by how much a particular charity has benefited, something that is not always well publicised except perhaps by the largest groups.

Advertising Standards Authority, 0171-580 5555; The Charity Commission, 0171-210 4477; The Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Fund (donations) 0990 664422.

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Take a charitable line on rates

Banks and building societies are being urged to offer more flexible accounts and better interest rates to charities that bank with them. However, some providers that restrict the number of withdrawals from accounts say they do so to keep down costs.

Even those banks that emphasise their ethical roots, such as the Co-operative Bank, may not necessarily pay the best interest rates to charities. For example, the Co-Op Bank's investment account pays 4.34 per cent on balances of £500 and above. But that is restricted to a 90-day notice account. For cheque accounts, the rate is just 3 per cent on balances of £1 or more, but charges may be levied.

Moneyfacts, the money information service, prefers investment managers who offer tailor-made accounts for charities. COIF Charity Funds (0171-338 1813) has an instant access deposit account that pays interest of 6.85 per cent gross on sums of £1 or above.

The CalCash Account, run by the Charities Aid Foundation (CAF) is offering a competitive rate of return (current interest rate: 6.77 per cent) on a minimum balance of £1.

Sue Pavey, CAF Banking and Investment Services manager, says: "The account is open to registered charities and organisations with charitable aims. It was launched in 1986 and pays the same rates of interest on sums of £1 and above." CAF has an arrangement with Midland Bank that allows members to deposit cash at branches without charge. It has similar arrangements with banks in Scotland.

The CalCash deposit account does not provide cash withdrawals or overdrafts, so any cheques that might tip the account into the red are not cleared. CalCash also runs a cheque account that charges 30p for each cheque and provides standing orders, direct debits and foreign payments.

CAF has also launched a CalGold fund that has attracted £73 million of charitable money since the start of August. Ms Pavey says: "It is a



Give and take: it is often difficult to get a good return

straight deposit account with no chequebook facility and thus allows us to pay higher rates of interest." There is no notice period for transfers of funds to other bank accounts. It is currently paying 6.85 per cent on balances under £2 million and 6.98 on balances over £2 million. CAF's banking service may be contacted on 01732 520033.

If you intend to set up a charity account and need to register officially to have charitable status, call the Charity Commission (0171-210 3000). Under the Charities Act, you have to keep accounts that may be viewed by the public. The Charity Commission has several leaflets explaining how to set up a charity. There are four main qualifying areas: religion, education, the benefit of society, and charitable causes.

The commission also has

information about making donations to charities in the most cost-effective way.

Christine Bayliss, Moneyfacts investment editor, says there are a number of good rates for charity accounts now available. She likes the Northern Rock (0500 505000) charity instant access account, which

is currently paying 6.2 per cent on balances of £1 and above. Interest is half yearly.

Market Harborough Building Society (01833 463244) has an instant access account paying 5.9 per cent on sums of £1. Interest is paid yearly.

Similar accounts designed specifically for charities and paying competitive rates on small balances are available from the Nottingham and Safeway Waldean Building Societies.

For higher balances, the Ecology Building Society (01535 635933) pays 4.6 per cent yearly on sums between £25 and £50,000, while Marsden Building Society (01282 440500) accepts sums of up to £100,000 and pays a 5 per cent rate of interest, but will open charity accounts only for local residents. Interest is yearly.

An alternative is the Treasurer's Account, from National Savings, launched in September last year. It is available to non-profit organisations with a minimum of £10,000 to invest. It pays 5.5 per cent gross on balances of £10,000 to £24,999 and 5.75 per cent gross on balances from £25,000 to £99,999.

Meanwhile, CAF, the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales and Charity Forum, is sponsoring the 1997 Charity Annual Report and Accounts Award. Deadline for entries is October 31 and there are prizes of £2,000. Call Nikki White, CAF, on 01732 520074.

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Nigel Bruce

PRUDENTIAL

1. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 1997; 277: 1039-1043.

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WEEKEND MONEY LETTERS

Definitely not a mutual friend

From Mr Paul Carwardine
Sir, While Nationwide may be welcoming small investors back to the fold (Weekend Money, October 18) it would appear to be less enthusiastic about retaining its existing customers.

On Monday at 3.20 pm I visited my local branch in Chelmsford with the objective of having my passbook updated.

I found all the tills closed and was informed that since the end of September, transactions could be carried out only between 11am and 3pm. Silly me!

I could, of course, use the automatic machines provided using my PIN, apart from the fact that Nationwide has

never issued me with such a number.

I find it very difficult to remember the numerous PINs I already possess, or any number for that matter (I once rang directory inquiries when I forgot my home telephone number — to be told it was ex-directory) and prefer to deal in person, especially when paying money into accounts.

This disregard for members' needs was further emphasised by the fact that the next customer was accompanied by a guide-dog and like me had expected to be able to conduct his business at the counter. To be fair to Nationwide, a member of staff operated the ATM for him — but, of course, that meant he had to

disclose his PIN to everyone in the branch, which was hardly in the interest of security.

By coincidence, my next visit was to my branch of Lloyds Bank where the tills were open, manned by helpful and polite staff — and would remain so until the close of business.

If the above experience is an example of the advantages of mutual status — the faster Nationwide converts, or is taken over by a bank, the better.

Yours faithfully,
PAUL CARWARDINE,
Laurel House,
The Fairways,
Cold Norton,
Chelmsford,
Essex

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MASTERMIND



Premium Bonds might look less fun if you knew the National Savings cut

From Mr Robert J. Stradling
Sir, Premium Bonds are a form of gambling that seems popular among your correspondents. As many seem to view Premium Bonds as a form of investment, I wonder whether they have ever taken time to consider whether they are getting value for money.

The odds of winning a prize in November's draw will be 10,000 to 1. Assuming a maximum holding of £20,000 and all prizes won to be £50, this might yield £63.58 a year, or 3.16 per cent net. At 23 per cent tax, this grosses up to 4.1 per cent and at 40 per cent tax the yield would be 5.27 per cent.

Gambling organisations make money by taking a cut. A typical cut might be where a casino would take £100 in bets and pay out £97 in winnings. The more bets, the more slices of 3 per cent the provider of this form of entertainment gets.

In Weekend Money of October 11, the best instant-access rate was quoted as 7.45 per cent gross. Given the above

parameters, the National Savings cut is therefore at least 29 per cent. This cut gets worse for standard-rate taxpayers and non-taxpayers (probably the vast majority of Bond holders), making for an even more miserly return.

Whether Bond holders consider this value for money depends on the price they put on the enjoyment factor of the prospect of a big win, and the security of the stake/capital being backed by the Government. Premium Bonds are therefore arguably an expensive bet. As ever, it is up to the investor to compare homes for his money. National Savings is a market-led organisation. If customers could see clearly the likely return on Premium Bonds, NS would have to increase the prize rates or face the same consequences as a high street deposit-taker that offered uncompetitive rates.

Yours faithfully,
ROBERT J. STRADLING,
20 Livingstone Road,
Daventry, Northamptonshire

Quirks of tax rates and investors' income

From Mr M. C. Fitzpatrick
Sir, Joe Wignall (Weekend Money Letters, October 18) comments on the tax position of dividend and interest income received by taxpayers paying basic-rate income tax at 23 per cent. Specifically, Mr Wignall queries whether such individuals face an income tax charge on the 3 per cent difference between the 23 per cent basic rate and the 20 per cent rate of tax deducted at source on dividend/interest income.

The answer to this is that a basic-rate income taxpayer does not face such a 3 per cent tax charge. This rather odd effect is achieved as a result of the tax legislation stating that dividend/interest income received by a basic-rate taxpayer is only taxed at 20 per cent, not at 23 per cent; as a result, and assuming that tax at 20 per cent has been

deducted at source, no further tax is payable by the basic-rate taxpayer on dividend/interest income.

The position is more complicated if the individual concerned is a higher-rate taxpayer. Broadly, higher-rate tax cuts in when taxable income exceeds £30,145; income received in excess of this will bear tax at 40 per cent. If dividend/interest income pushes an individual into the higher-rate tax band, such income will be taxed at 40 per cent.

The overall effect of this absurdly complicated tax regime is most easily illustrated with three examples, each of an individual in receipt of dividend/interest income (gross) of £2,000. In the case of an individual with taxable income (including the £2,000 dividend/interest income) of less than £30,145, the

dividend/interest income will be taxed at 20 per cent. In the case of an individual with taxable income of, say, £31,145, then £1,000 of the dividend/interest income will be taxed at 20 per cent and the other £1,000 at 40 per cent. Finally, in the case of an individual with taxable income of £32,145-plus, the whole of the £2,000 dividend/interest will be taxed at 40 per cent.

One of these days, someone may try to simplify our tax system. However, even with the current advancements in medical science, don't count on it occurring during the lifetime of anyone now living!

Yours faithfully,
M. C. FITZPATRICK
(Tax Partner,
Chantrey Vellacott),
Russell Square House,
10-12 Russell Square,
London, WC1

Swallowing a fund of ethical nonsense

From Mr John A. Leeffe
Sir, Yet another survey by a minority single-issue lobby has produced the result intended by those who commissioned it. Why the media swallows and then promotes the findings of weighted question surveys like the one commissioned on pension investment by Ethical Investment Research is one of life's mysteries.

Fortunately for those of us living on a retirement pension, and for the many thousands working in our politically incorrect industries, pension fund managers are made of less gullible stuff. Their current investment of under 1 per cent of UK pension fund assets in ethical funds is therefore most reassuring.

Yours faithfully,
JOHN A. LEEFFE,
3 Sowbury Park,
Chieveley,
Newbury,
Berkshire

Tax calculations in the wrong key

From the Rev John B. Job
Sir, The most prudent approach to self-assessment is to do the sums oneself, keep a copy, and then request the Revenue to do them — before it is too late, of course. The result in my case was that when its answer came, the balance had switched some hundreds of pounds in its favour, compared with my calculations. It transpired that my figures had been wrongly keyed in at the Revenue's end because two entries had changed to be identical.

I readily forgive the mistake. But the weakness in the system is that one does not receive in response to one's return a print-out matching the configuration of the form one sends in. If this were provided, it would make the discovery of errors much more straightforward.

Yours faithfully,
JOHN JOB,
6 Newhaven Close,
Chatterfield

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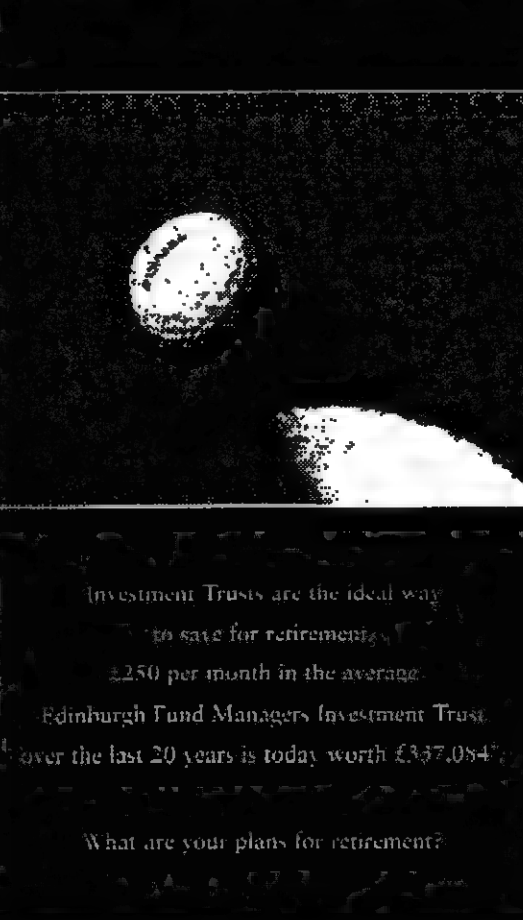
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TPN251097

1. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 1997; 277: 1033-1037.

Concern is growing over best-buy advice, says Patrick Collinson

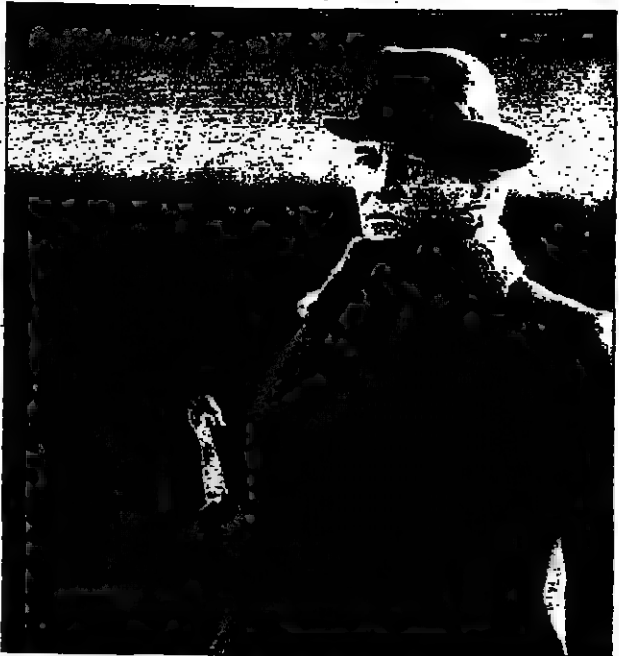
Consumer Panel calls independents to book

How "independent" is independent financial advice? IFAs trumpet their skill at picking the right financial product for clients from the multitude available, but an official report out this week highlights growing concern about restrictive and potentially commission-related "best-buy panels".

A best-buy, or best-advice, panel is a recommended list of products, typically put together by a large firm of independent financial advisers, or a network of smaller IFAs. What is causing concern is the extent to which they represent not what is best for the client, but what is best for the broker's commission.

Best-buy panels are cloaked in secrecy. Few IFAs will reveal a list of which companies and products are on their panels, possibly fearing scrutiny of their choices. The common reason given is that best-buy panels represent expensive research, which they do not wish to share with competitors.

The product providers — largely life insurance and PEP companies — are desperate to gain entry to the best-buy lists for the guaranteed sales they



A man alone: advisers' best-buy lists may not be all they seem

deliver. Up to a half of all product sales by IFAs are now via best-buy lists, and no product provider will openly criticise what are, in effect, their biggest customers. But in private the talk is of commis-

sion negotiations, which can tip a perfectly good product off a so-called best-buy panel to make way for one carrying a higher commission.

This week the Personal Investment Authority Consumer Panel, an independent body made up of a number of consumer and voluntary organisations, highlighted its concerns about the quality and impartiality of best advice panels. It recommended that clients be warned about the existence of a best-buy panel, that advisers should be allowed to go "off-panel" in their recommendations, and that there should be no set number of product providers on a best-buy list.

It also called for effective Chinese Walls, forcing product research and commission negotiations to be completely separated, to avoid best-buy panels simply reflecting which company is paying the best commission.

Barbara Saunders, the Consumer Panel chairman, said: "It's very difficult to get clear answers about the extent to which commission is influencing product recommendations. Advisers say that commission is not part of the equation, but we are not entirely convinced that that is always the case. We would be

happier if there was much more openness about the criteria advisers are using in best advice panels."

Bradford & Bingley, the only remaining major high street building society which promotes independent financial advice, confirms that it operates a best-buy list. Its list reveals that a customer seeking pensions advice from B&B will be offered a product from one of only six pension companies on its list, while the endowment choice is limited to just three providers. Yet Barbara Saunders says that she would expect a best-buy list to have many more than five providers.

Lynn Coleman, Bradford & Bingley marketing manager, robustly defends the best-buy panel. She says B&B spends more than £100,000 a year researching products for the best deals and updates its best-buy list regularly.

But Roddy Kohn, of Kohn Cougar, the Bristol-based advisers, said: "We don't operate a panel. We don't take the product first and see how the customer will fit into it, but genuinely tailor-make each piece of product advice to suit an individual's particular circumstances."

Mr Kohn, who is also a PLA board member, agrees that clients should be told of the existence of the panels. "If someone goes to an IFA for total freedom and total choice, then they should be told if what they are being offered is straight off the panel," he said. Another adviser said that a choice of just three to five providers for a product category was too low. Roderic Kennison, of Robson Rhodes, who represents a group of accountancy-based IFAs, said that although his company operates a best-buy panel, there are typically seven to nine products in each category. "I would be surprised if a panel had less than five or six providers on it," he said.

Mr Kohn is calling for a maximum commission agreement, in which commission on product categories such as pensions and endowments would be standardised. This was tried out in the late 1980s, but promptly abolished by the Office of Fair Trading as "anti-competitive."

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FAR EAST CRISIS 52

The Hang Seng tremor rattles nerves worldwide

WEEKEND MONEY

INTO BATTLE 57

Knight sallies forth for small shareholders



THE TIMES: PERSONAL FINANCE NEWSPAPER OF THE YEAR



CHRIS ROSE/REUTERS

The healthy option for self-employed

Being self-employed offers many advantages but the fear of being struck down by illness or injury always lurks at the back of the mind. This is why insuring your health when you are your own boss is essential.

This week *Going Alone* looks at permanent health insurance (PHI). PHI policies will normally pay up to 60 per cent of your gross monthly income if you are unable to work. Taking a policy out is not hard and can be as cheap or expensive as you want, depending on how soon you want the payments to start after you stop work. However, proving your income if you are newly self-employed could be tricky.

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Marianne Curphey on the lure of commission

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Is this the end of the studio flat?



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Savings group takes a new track



WEEKEND MONEY

GUIDE

Saving for Your Future



WEEKEND MONEY is edited by Anne Ashworth

Radical review gets 1,000 replies

The Government has received more than 1,000 responses to a pensions review it hopes will deliver a radical solution to the problem of provision in the decades ahead.

The life assurance industry, plus all financial institutions with an interest in savings and investment, was invited to contribute during the two-month consultation period. The conclusions will form part of a Green Paper to be published at the beginning of next year.

In announcing the review, the Government urged the industry to leave no stone unturned. It wanted every avenue for the future of pensions explored, against a background of preserving the state earnings-related pension scheme (Serps), and introducing

a new concept of a "stakeholder" pension. This would be introduced to ensure that all members of society would be included in the new pensions regime, even those who did no paid work, or were on very low wages.

While the Government considers the responses, DSS officials are putting together detailed proposals about the structure of "stakeholder" pensions themselves. Last week the DSS was still unable to give even a rough idea of what "stakeholder" actually meant.

Some within the industry believe the Government will have to include some form of compulsion in its plans, while others believe this will be almost impossible to enforce. Many are concerned about the future viability of Serps. The

Government has been inundated with advice on the new stakeholder pensions, says Caroline Merrell

fact that contributions from those entering the scheme have to be used to pay pensions of those retiring means that as the population ages, there will be less money to support more people. The DSS reiterated last week that the Government was committed to maintaining Serps.

In its review submission, the National Association of Pension Funds (NAPF), that represents hundreds of pension fund managers, claims that even the basic state

pension is not particularly efficient. The basic pension, currently worth about £62 per week, will be roughly worth half what it is today. The NAPF claims the present basic pension system is wasteful. It says: "This is because it provides too little for the poor and provides money that is not strictly needed for the rich. We therefore believe in a targeted basic state pension, but without the disadvantages of post-retirement means-testing."

Controversially, the NAPF believes Serps is unlikely to be

an efficient method of delivering pensions. It says: "Our view is that the accrual of Serps should cease for those under the age of 50 and existing benefits should be preserved and indexed."

The NAPF is also keen to preserve and extend the benefits of occupational schemes, but believes those who do not have a company scheme should put 10 per cent of their wages in a stakeholder plan. It adds: "Modelling has shown that with total employee/employer contributions of 10 per cent, a high proportion of individuals could look forward to an adequate income from the stakeholder pension." The NAPF thinks 10 per cent contributions would produce a pension equivalent to 50 per cent of final salary.

Legal & General, in its submission to the Government, is against compulsion. "The new system should be voluntary not compulsory. Our own research shows that there is now widespread public acceptance that the State cannot provide generous pensions in future. All that is needed to galvanise those feelings into actions," it says. L&G wants the basic state pension privatised, to help to boost the pensions of the low paid. It also wants stakeholder pensions, easily transferable.

Pearl wants the stakeholder pension made up of a national insurance element, some personal contributions and some automatic life cover with some premium paying flexibility, with premiums continued to be paid if customers lose their jobs.

More fireworks over Hong Kong



The Hong Kong stock market fell a total of 12 per cent this week, substantially cutting the value of the £5 billion held by UK investors in Far Eastern unit trusts.

The fall, triggered by the currency turmoil in other Asian countries, is the first of the shocks predicted by many fund managers after the handover of the colony to the Chinese at the end of June.

At one point during the week, the market had dropped 16 per cent, the biggest fall since the October 1987 crash. Other stock markets around the world fell on the back of the collapse. However, some recovery seemed on its way yesterday with the Hong Kong market up 700 points.

At the time of the handover, some in the investment community said the Hong Kong stock market was bound to be volatile. The source of volatility was expected to be the Chinese Government — any hint of a return to hardline communism would have a big impact on share prices. None predicted that Hong Kong would suffer from the same problems that have hit

Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia. The currencies of all three have been devalued in the wake of wave after wave of currency speculation in the region.

The fact the Hong Kong dollar is pegged to the US dollar has been central to economic stability for the colony. According to fund managers, UK investors looking at losses on their Hong Kong trusts should take heart from the pledge by the Chinese that it plans to keep the currency peg in place. Devaluing the currency would substantially cut the value of Hong Kong shares in sterling. If the pattern of the other Asian countries were followed, then a devaluation would almost certainly be followed by further falls in stock prices.

However, the cost of keeping the currency peg in place will almost certainly be higher interest rates. Any increase in interest rates will hit both the commercial and residential property market. The performance of about 40 per cent of the companies in the Hang Seng index is directly related to the property market.

The other big companies in the index are the banks and companies that reap most of their profits from China, the so-called red chips. The banks will also be hit by any rise in interest rates, while many fund managers have had concerns about the valuations of the red chips for some time.

Hugh Young, managing director of Aberdeen Asset Management (Asia), said that problems for UK investors with holdings in Asia had been exacerbated because many investment houses had switched their investments into Hong Kong believing it to be immune to the problems that are affecting the other areas of the region.

He pointed out that the peg meant the country could keep interest rates down even though headline inflation was high. He said: "For the last five years, money has been virtually free in Hong Kong." He felt the outlook for the market was rocky in the short term.

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HALLOWE'EN



Tricks and treats for little horrors

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Fur to die for: return of the fabulous fakes

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GARDENING



England's prop chills out in Bath

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TRAVEL



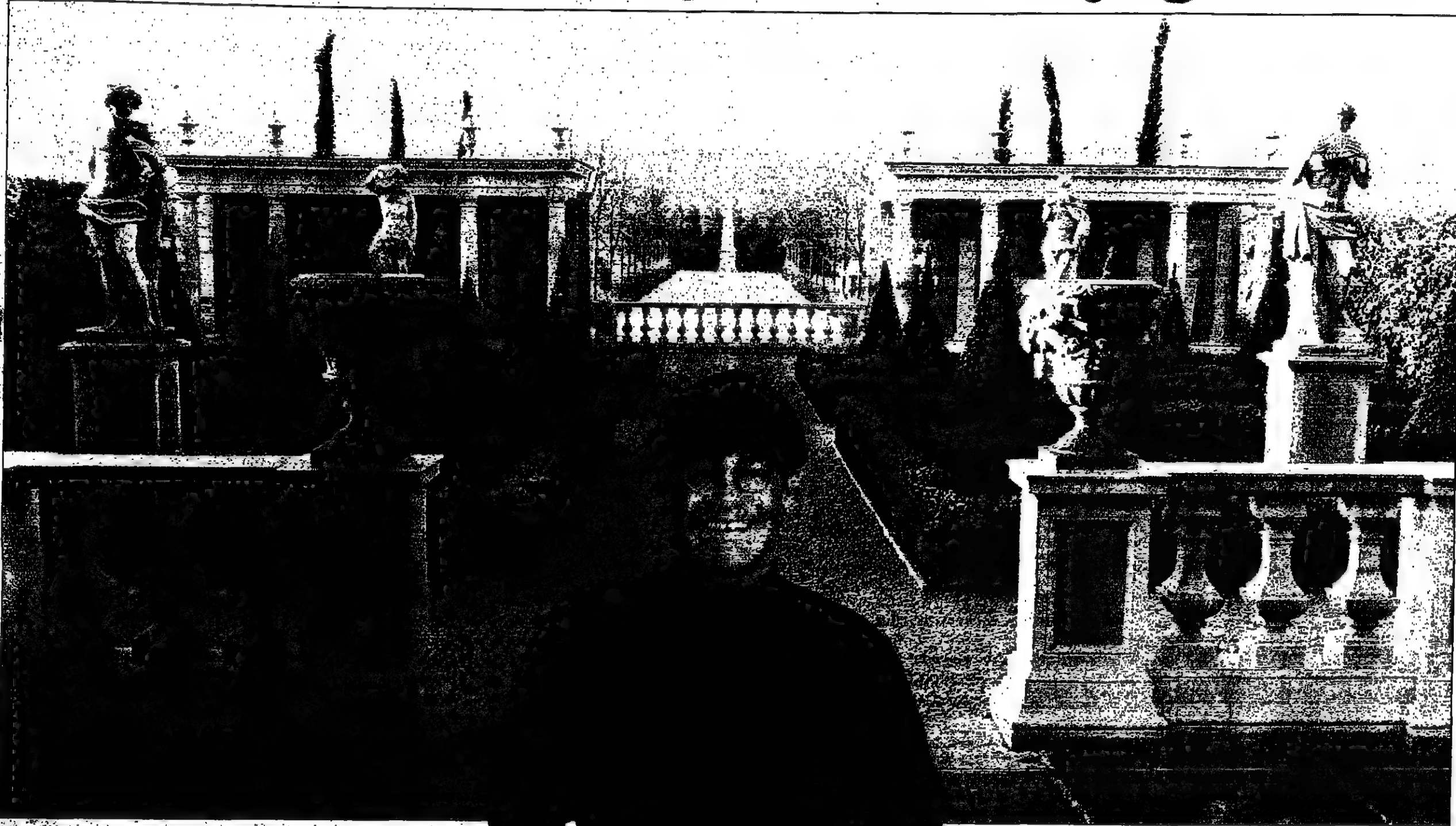
Take a flying leap into the virgin snow

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THE TIMES WEEKEND

SATURDAY OCTOBER 25 1997

Elton John: Why I love my garden



The singer explains how gardening captured his heart and why he has turned 30 acres of Berkshire into his most prized possession

On a sweltering summer's day last year, Sir Roy Strong, through the gilded archway of Elton John's country mansion, up the stately avenue of chestnuts, around a pond, and past a 17th-century orangery with a lead ceiling, to inspect the Italian garden.

Elton, whose record *Candle in the Wind* has just become the world's best-selling single, ousting Bing Crosby's *White Christmas*, was waiting in the drawing room of Woodside, Old Windsor, where he had had thrown open the French windows. The sun was streaming through and there, in front of them, was the new balustraded terrace. Sir Roy had designed, leading on to his box parterre with

statues. "We threw our arms around each other in the drawing room and danced for joy," Sir Roy recalls. "There is an enthusiasm and a delight about Elton and his garden which is infectious."

Elton had asked him to design an Italian garden on the advice of the late fashion designer Gianni Versace. He says: "I asked Sir Roy, who had

designed Gianni's garden in Como, to do it because of their friendship," he explains. "The Italian gardens were done very quickly, starting in January and finishing in April."

Elton's love of gardens goes back to his childhood: "My grandfather died when I was five and my grandmother, Ivy, eventually remarried a man called Horace Sewell, who had one leg — he lost the other in the First World War. He was the first person I knew who was crazy about gardening. He worked for a gardening

firm in Pinner and was a most amazing gardener, a real dahlia man. Besides our garden, which he loved, Horace had a couple of allotments and he grew incredible flowers: roses; his beloved dahlias, which he used to exhibit at the local agricultural show every year; chrysanthemums, which I don't particularly care for; sweet peas and various vegetables. My grandmother Ivy always loved gardening too, and was a marvellous gardener. So they were both extremely influential. "I really care about the seasons and watching

things grow. After all, flowers and plants are such an integral part of human life. In the house where I was born in Pinner Hill Road, we had a beautiful garden and we always had a mass of flowers in the house throughout my childhood. Even though the gardens of my youth were small and suburban, they were invariably pretty. As a kid, you're always made to mow the lawn. I didn't mind mowing, but weeding I hated. I've always loved gardens and I've always loved flowers but I

GARDENING 66 PROPERTY 12-13 HOME LIFE 15 COUNTRY LIFE 16 FAITH 19 TRAVEL 21-29 GAMES 31,32

L'Art de l'Assemblage by Baron Philippe de Rothschild

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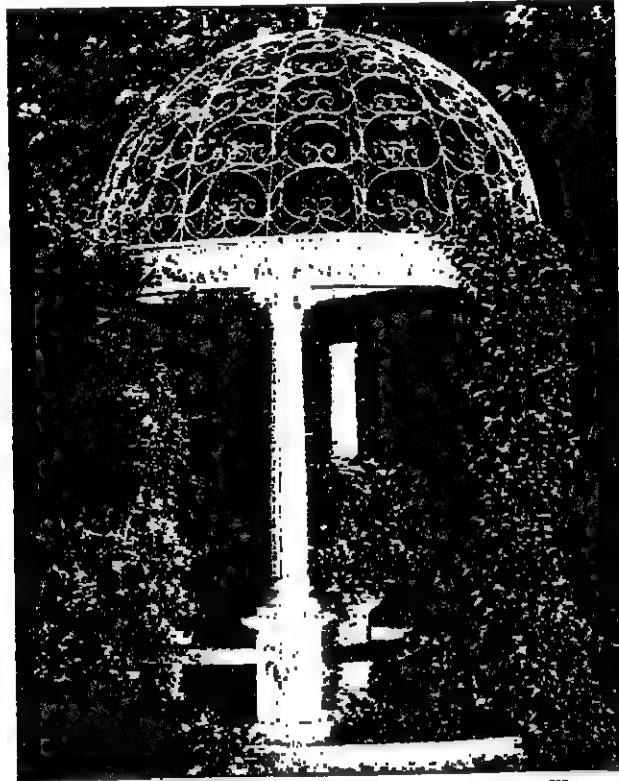
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2 · cover story



Woodside, reflected in the ornamental lake and guarded by marble statuary, is surrounded by lawns and a camellia glade



Treasures: a wooden gazebo and fountains (left), and an 18th-century gazebo with a grey-green cupola and stone pillars

Continued from page 1
haven't got green fingers." Elton is particular about his flowers: "There are certain ones which I simply can't abide — chrysanthemums, which remind me of death and which I absolutely refuse to have in my hotel rooms. I loathe baby's breath and I'm not very fond of carnations. I can't stand them in a vase or on their own, and I can't believe men actually wear them in their buttonholes. The only place where they are pretty, and should remain, is in a garden."

Have flowers influenced his music? "I can't say that they have — in any way other than having them around when I work out a melody."

He likes vegetables, too. "My vegetable garden, in which everything is organically grown, is just fabulous. Everything is healthy and tastes better. And as for our pumpkin that won third prize in horticultural show, I've

never seen a bigger pumpkin in my life — it weighed 170lb. I was so proud."

"When you have a garden this size, you have to have enough people caring for it. Charlie, our head gardener, who has been with us for years, is very knowledgeable. We have five extremely good, full-time gardeners, which I think is absolutely necessary. We cut roses, gladioli, sweet peas, sweet-williams, peonies, yellow daisies, dahlias and scabious from the potager and garden, which is lovely."

Elton's gardens and woodland at Woodside, which stretch for more than 30 acres, are treasured beyond most of his possessions. "I love coming home to this house," he says. "It gives me a sense of peace. When I go on tour people often say to me, 'How can you bear to leave Woodside?' I tell them the only way I can is knowing I can come back to it. I go through these gates, knowing I'm away for

three or four months and think, 'God, how much I long to get back.' When I do, I see the garden changing — there's always something magical happening here."

"Woodside is the hub of my soul probably: the centre of my life. My other houses — in London, Atlanta and the south of France — are like appendages to the tree."

About six years ago, Elton asked the Prince of Wales's septuagenarian garden designer Rosemary Verey to help him create something special. "I love nooks and crannies in gardens," Rosemary Verey designed two English cottage gardens at Woodside, one of which has a porcelain pathway. They are very magical and special places for me. She placed two seats in them and I love to sit there contemplating in the summer time, surrounded by huge hollyhocks, globe thistles and drifts of forget-me-nots."

Mrs Verey is delighted by Elton's enthusiasm. "He loves the final effect, he really does," she rills. "I feel sure that he walks around his garden as much as he can. He loved all the plants that he remembered as a child, such as lupins, tulips and delphiniums."

"One of the first borders I did was all in rainbow colours. I call it the rainbow border. In fact, when he invited me to his fancy-dress birthday party last

year, I went as the rainbow border." Mrs Verey also planted a scented garden, and an 18th-century garden. "I have enjoyed walking round the garden with Elton. I always think Elton is actually a genius. In the wood there is a red pillar box as well as the telephone box. And there is Daisy the Dinosaur he was given by Paul McCartney. Daisy was in the middle of the lawns, but was removed by helicopter to the woods. If you walk past the dinosaur at night, the eyes light up."

Sir Roy Strong remembers a railway carriage in the middle of a lawn. "Elton asked me what he should do with it. 'Well, I should leave it where it is,' I said."

There is a kind of beguiling eccentricity to the garden. His enthusiasm is both guided and misguided but it has a warmth. He has an original streak but it is totally untrained. There is nothing wrong with that, but Gianni Versace was working on it. Elton is a most sweet and affectionate person. At his

birthday, when he went round all the tables, I got up and kissed him on both cheeks."

The admiration is mutual. "People like Sir Roy Strong can teach you so many things," Elton says. "And Rosemary's a sensational woman. She's incredibly energetic, never stops... I don't know how she does it. She's just a wonderful creature. I adore her." Nevertheless, Elton's decision to bring in the Italian garden did

not go down well with Mrs Verey, since one of hers had to be flattened. "The only logical place you could have it near the house, and at the same time reach into the field to get the right perspective, was where Rosemary had planted the beautiful white garden," Elton explains.

"It was a wrench, because I didn't want to get rid of her garden, so we shifted it over, and now it will have to grow all over again. Already the white flowering roses, one of my favourites, are flourishing."

The Italian garden, with its mass of scarlet geraniums surrounded by boxwood, is very striking because you can

go and look at the house from the avenue of trees leading to the obelisk and the house looks better than before."

Mrs Verey's disappointment is palpable. Although she would never admit it publicly, she clearly feels that an Italian Classical garden is not quite the thing to go with a postwar mock Georgian house. "My initial feeling was that I got upset. But for goodness sake, it's not my garden, it's his."

Sir Roy is diplomacy itself, although there is a sense that he is not fanatical about Mrs Verey's cottage gardens being attached to a house of this size. "She was very sweet. She sent

me a letter saying how nice the Italian garden looked when it was finished."

Like many moneyed individuals, Elton "likes the instant," says Sir Roy. And if a whim such as an Italian garden takes him, so be it.

Elton says: "Apart from a few trees, this garden is only six years old. When I had the house redone, we flattened everything and basically started again. You have to be very, very patient. It'll take a long time for it to grow and evolve, but one of the joys of having a new garden like this is that every year you see it blossom; it grows fuller and you can watch it mature."

"Down by the monkey tree near the Orangery we have just planted some Japanese maples. Having witnessed the most amazing autumn I have ever seen in Atlanta, the most richly beautiful of all the seasons I think, and seen how that red colour changes, I came home with a special urge to plant some. So that is another special nook I love."

"We probably spend more money on trees than anything else, but it is so beautiful to plant things like my favourite oaks, as well as weeping willows, magnolias and the big catalpa [Indian bean tree] on the front lawn, and to watch things grow and prosper."

"The nice thing now is that I get up at seven o'clock in the morning, I see the sun rise, and notice how beautiful it is here first thing in the morning; how peaceful the cows look in the fields in the summertime."

© Adapted from Elton John's *Flower Fantasies: An Intimate Tour of his House and Garden*, by Caroline Cass (Waldenfield & Nicholson, £18.99).

Photographs by ANDREW TORT

THE TIMES/DILLONS FORUM

A satirical walk with **BILL BRYSON**



READERS are invited to a forum with the bestselling author Bill Bryson, when he will read extracts from his gripping new book, *A Walk in the Woods*, giving accounts of his experiences along the longest footpath in the world, the Appalachian Trail. The trail promised Bryson endless days of

walking and the chance to turn his satirical eye on his native America. The forum on Tuesday, November 4, will be held at the Institute of Education, 20 Bedford Way, London WC1, at 7.30pm. Tickets at £10 (concessions £7.50) include £2 off the price of *A Walk in the Woods* (Doubleday, £16.99).

Please send me tickets at £10 each (£7.50 concessions) for The Times/Dillons Bill Bryson Forum on Tuesday, November 4, at the Institute of Education, 20 Bedford Way, London WC1

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Above: an indoor statue draped with roses, lilies and ornamental cabbages, all entwined with vine leaves and ivy. Right: Elton's shoes topped with cyclamens



A day in the life of The Ivy

A.A. Gill clocks in for a double shift at the restaurant where London's elite wine, dine and clinch deals

A regular haunt of the rich, the famous and the beautiful people, The Ivy is one of the hardest restaurants in London at which to get a booking. Those who succeed tend to be from a certain background: media, theatrical and well-connected types. A busy day at The Ivy is as might be expected given its staff and its clientele, a drama all of its own.

6.45am: The day begins. This kitchen looks like the engine room of a beached battleship, all iron and steel pipes and ducts, thick and corrugated, worn rough and smooth.

The commis chef puts a pot, big enough to boil a small missionary, on to the wide burner and chunks in skeleton segments of bones two-handedly. This cauldron will simmer and bubble all day until the bones are bleached dry, making stock, the fuel of traditional kitchens — sticky, meaty, chameleon goodness that is the base for soups, sauces and glazes.

7.15am: The day's first delivery: bags of potatoes, boxes of squash, carrots, onions, beans.

8.00am: Breakfast. Bacon sandwiches for the kitchen, sliced white, chin-dribbling, eaten standing. The first Black Suit arrives. A front-of-house manager, he hurries through the dining room turning on lights.

Over by the hellish deep fat fryer, a big chef takes a small onion bhaji, fries it and presses it, tries it again and takes it to the sous-chef to taste.

"Not enough salt." He gives it to me to taste. "Not enough salt." "Better put some more salt in it then."

9.00am: The Ivy is having a problem with lunch. It's not that tables might be unoccupied, but most of the large tables have been given to regulars.

The margin for profit in a restaurant, even one as popular as this, is measured in single figures, and a table for four with two people sitting at it is as big a waste as the kitchen dropping a whole goose liver down the waste disposal unit. What they want is a couple of sizes.

9.30am: Mitchell, the restaurant manager, arrives already dressed in his suit, ploughing back and forth across the restaurant like the captain's cutter, checking, checking. Service is all in the detail.

10.00am: The sous-chef bustles past a mill of waiters to a white plastic board and writes "Fish of the day" with a felt pen. "Swordfish — no nuts, no garlic."

Mitch swings through the restaurant again, checking Worcester sauce, mustard — English and French — Tabasco for oysters and steak tartare and ketchup for whatever you like.

11.30am: Mitch calls the waiters, now changed into their black uniforms, to a pre-lunch briefing. The bookings are complete.

"Table One", Mitch says, "Harry Clouet and one guest. Mr Clouet is a literary agent."

And so it goes. "Table Twelve's got a plane to catch. Twelve will have liver well done, but no bacon. Watch that India Puce doesn't have to pass Perdita Dose — they're both up for the same part."



In the kitchen of The Ivy, the quest for perfection is relentless. It is a never-ending ritual of tasting and seasoning, with the ultimate aim of pleasing some of the most famous palates in London



Media's movers and shakers launch countless schemes behind these doors, left, and right, the catch of the day



12.00pm: The caress of manipulation does not stop at the table. The Ivy knows how you should sit. Couples on dates are arranged side by side or at right angles. Strangers, negotiators or colleagues are opposite. A table for three is complicated. If two of the three are married or work together, it may be natural to place the singleton between them, but that's all wrong. He'll spend his time swivelling his head, like it's the Centre Court.

1.20pm: In the kitchen there is a problem: a Bang-Bang.

Chicken and Caesar Salad jam. The chef, Des McDonald, shouts out the complete order so everyone can synchronise. He is a big, imposing, frightening man. There may be lovable chefs, but I've yet to meet one at work.

The pastry section maintains a semblance of calm, but even here, the chefs' voices submerged beneath the din, their grumpy insouciance could only be French.

1.30pm: The bar is full as co-owner Jeremy King walks into the restaurant.

For every service, either Jeremy or his partner Chris Corbin will spend some time in the restaurant. He stops at a novelist and his agent. The writer is ecstatic that someone actually wants to talk about his book rather than deals and print runs and electronic rights and begins to explain the plot. Raising a hand, Jeremy smiles and asks him not to spoil it for him.

2.00pm: There's still a traffic jam, but the panic has ebbed. Mitch emerges with a plate of pasta tied in knots. The chef has a forensic pick through it. Well, it happens.

2.30pm: In the kitchen, lunch is virtually finished. There are a couple of tables which may or may not want pudding, but there is no time to sit back and admire the morning's work.

2.45pm: Time for the regular weekly meeting to taste specials. The Ivy operates on the simple edict that you start with what the customer wants to eat — not with what the chef wants to cook.

4.30pm: The doorman arrives. Glad-hand, Irish matey. He swivels around the reservations book and makes a note of his favourite customers.

Evening *maitre d'hôtel*, Fernando, a slight, bespectacled fellow, hurries in late. A table apparently not having a positively perfect time is a continual concern for him. His great skill is not to appear too busy.

5.30pm: The first pre-theatre diners trickle in. They tend to be slightly older than the later sittings, from a generation that doesn't mind eating when it's still light. Theatre curtains go up at about 7.30, and everyone has to be fed two, occasionally three, courses with enough time to make the curtain and order the interval drinks. The head waiter can't hold up the orders to ease the lot of the kitchen. They just have to get on with it.

The chef stands, bellowing, "Seventeen. Two Caesar, one Shepherd, one Fish of the Day, Pommes Allumettes. Table Twelve in one minute."

8.30pm: The restaurant is full. If we were in France we would be thinking about where to go at this time. In Spain we

would still be in our socks and underpants. But for the British, 8.30 is when convention, digestion and babysitters say we should eat.

Diners are on their feet talking and glad-handing. This table-hopping business is an essential part of the arts and media world.

You couldn't begin to count the number of magazine features, films, television programmes, theatre productions, books and radio series that have had their genesis or some part of their history in this room.

9.30pm: On his arrival, Chris glances at the reservations book. There's a quivering 30 seconds while he absorbs the room. It's good tonight. The buzz, the feeling of enjoyment and expectation. The mix is right, a balance of pretty and witty. There is the sound of sizzling. Unremarkable to the untrained ear, it's followed by a loud crash.

10.00pm: Hell, hell, hell. A runner has dropped a tray. Dinner for a table of four has fed gravity. Two Cassoulets, Sea Bass, chips, Caesar Salad, plates, tin clothes, the whole sodding lot on the floor.

The floor of the kitchen is now treacherous, a slick film covering everything. A porter pushes a long mop like an ancient Rastafarian's head round the walkways.

"Special Table Fifteen. One minute." The dinner comes again. The runner puts it carefully on the tray.

10.30pm: Tables are turning as the non-theatre diners depart and the theatre crowd arrives. The bar is a seethe of acquaintances passing.

"How was it?" "How was the duck?" "How was the leading lady?"

11.00pm: A first-night party arrives with a bantering clamour like a group of Rada students making their first entrance as Montagues and Capulets. An opening night at a small, trendy, sold-out theatre.

The young star looks up and sees his glittering future unfold in a string of adoring Ivy diners.

Chris raises his eyebrows to the waiter. Champagne. On the house.

11.45pm: Just two tables to go. The manager thinks one may be a no-show. The other has called to say they'll be late. They are reminded that the kitchen closes at midnight. They want to order from the car.

It's slowing down and the chefs are thinking about home and night buses. The porters, though, are at full stretch. The crates of rubbish stack up. Bags of rubbish are humped into the street for the late-night binmen. If you ever need to get rid of a body, leave it in a bin bag outside the Ivy. No one would notice.

12.30am: Upstairs, the private party breaks up, drunkenly. A record producer with a grey ponytail and chardonnay down his *Comme des Garçons* shirt tells a waiter to pass on his compliments to the chef.

1.00am: A few tables linger over coffee. A girl with a big bosom has joined a table with two journalists. She sits with her chin on her hand, her chest resting on the back's arm. She isn't listening.

1.30am: The waiters wait until the last customer has left before beginning to tuck up the room for the night. When the house lights come on, the spirit of the drama is still palpable.

1.45am: Downstairs in the staff dining room four waiters and a couple of cooks slouch over their on-the-house cans of beer and chain-lit fags. Their exhaustion is apparent as they sit in their street clothes, unwilling to depart finally into the cold, quiet night.

2.00am: In the restaurant, only the managers and one waiter remain. Beautiful as a Degas, she sits with her head on one side, filling in the log, compiled after each sitting: "A good evening. Atmosphere fun. Sir Rowland was in looking well. First night of *Past Tense*. Comped champagne. Runner dropped tray behind Table Fifteen, just missed them — no casualties. Kitchen coped well. Ran out of serving spoons. Everyone turned up."

She puts the book away and goes down to hurry the porters. The waiter sits on the bar and kicks his heels. Behind him, the ashtrays and coffee cups drip dry.

2.30am: The manageress has a final check, switches off the lights and opens the back door. Eighty-two staff have fed 425 people. Eight glasses and four plates have been broken. No one's had a baby. There were three marriage proposals: one yes, one no, one don't know.

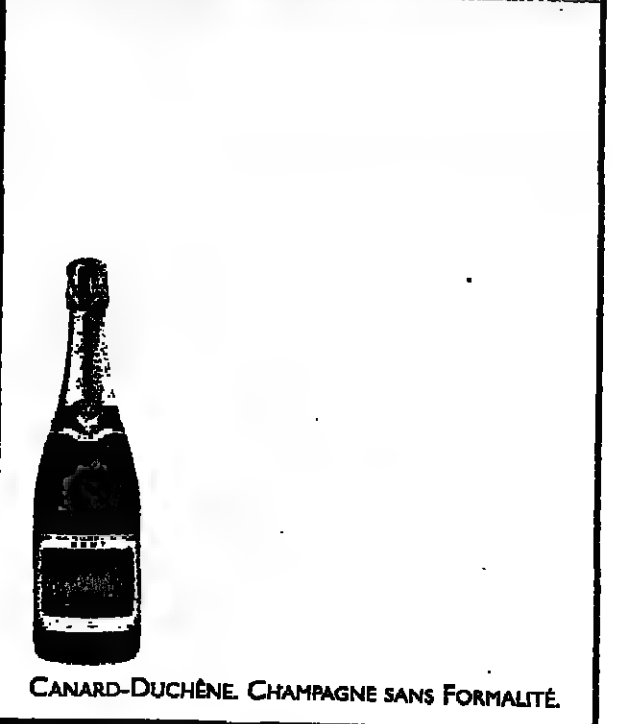
The manageress locks up and she and the waiter walk down the empty street. As they reach the corner, he snakes an arm round her waist. She looks up, they kiss.

Taken from The Ivy, the Restaurant and its Recipes, by A.A. Gill (Hodder & Stoughton, £25)

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"The one top chef's use because it makes it all so easy"

Designer Paloma Picasso has reinforced London's reputation as a hip city. She shops at Guinevere, Mike Cable reports

On the scent of fine finds

The fact that the supremely cosmopolitan Paloma Picasso chose to make London her home four years ago is a sure sign that the city is the world's most fashionable capital.

"New York wasn't fun any more, in Paris people were very negative and in Italy, Germany and the rest of continental Europe the mood was very depressed," Picasso says. "But in London I sensed a completely different atmosphere. There was a feeling that the worst was over and the place was starting to buzz again. Because I travel so much I'm very sensitive to that sort of thing."

Together with her new partner, French osteopath Eric Thevenet, she moved into a five-storey Chelsea town house and set about redecorating it from top to bottom, a project that involved regular visits to the King's Road antiques shop Guinevere.

"I do love to decorate my houses," says the 47-year-old multi-millionaire whose name is synonymous with designer chic. "For me, picking up various interesting objects is the first step in the process of creation."

"What I particularly like to do is to take things that don't belong to each other and make them work together. That's almost the way I work as a designer, too. I like to play with colour in a way that's unexpected and to marry things that are not supposed to go together."

For anyone with that approach, Guinevere, with its rich, magpie collection of unusual antiques from around the world — everything from 2,000-year-old Chinese tomb soldiers and Han Dynasty pottery to Anglo-Indian furniture and a unique 19th-century French steel sideboard — is a great source of inspiration.

The shop was opened in 1964 by French-born former milliner Genevieve Weaver, who now runs it as a family business with her sons Kevin and Marc, and has watched it expand from one shop to a series of ten show-rooms.

As a teenager in the Sixties, Picasso would fly to London every weekend to join in the "Swinging London" scene, and soon she had scores of fashionable friends, including Manolo Blahnik, who introduced her to the store.

The first thing I ever bought here was a huge 17th-century Venetian door, carved to look like a draped curtain," she recalls. "I fell in love with it, even though I had nowhere to put it at the time. Three years later, when I was living in New York, I had a letter from the shop asking me very politely if I would please come and pick it up, and I

my favourite shop



Where art and design merge

eventually had it made into a spectacular cabinet for my Paris apartment."

Today, she also uses Guinevere as a source of last-minute birthday presents. "I run in here and 20 minutes later I usually come out with a really wonderful gift," she says.

Picasso is always on the look-out for unusual objects; particular favourites in Guinevere include silver and crystal champagne bottles into which the Edwardians would decant their bubbly to reduce the bubbles. "So that it wouldn't make the ladies burp," explains owner Marc Weaver.

The designer is also intrigued by what turns out to be a moustache-waxing kit in solid silver from a 19th-century gentleman's travelling dressing set. "I love the sort of things that leave you trying to figure out exactly what they're for," she chuckles, adding: "If I find something I think is just right, I am not bothered about the price."

Picasso can afford to be generous. On top of the fortune she inherited from her father — who named her after the dove logo he designed for the 1949 Peace Congress in Paris — she has made millions more in her own right as a designer.

Although she trained as a jewellery designer, it was in partnership with her former husband Rafael Lopez-Carril that Picasso turned herself into a one-woman industry generating sales through her lipsticks, make-up and fashion



Paloma Picasso is a regular at Guinevere, the family-owned antiques business on London's King's Road run by Marc Weaver

accessory empire of nearly one billion dollars a year.

Her image, in posters and photographs, has always been the rather intimidating one of a style icon — pale face, jet black hair and trademark slash of red lipstick. But, in the flesh, and still dressed from

head to foot in black, she turns out to be friendly and easy-going.

"People are always surprised when they meet me for the first time," she says. "They expect me to be some sort of Valkyrie but I'm actually rather shy. And being shy, it is sometimes useful to hide behind

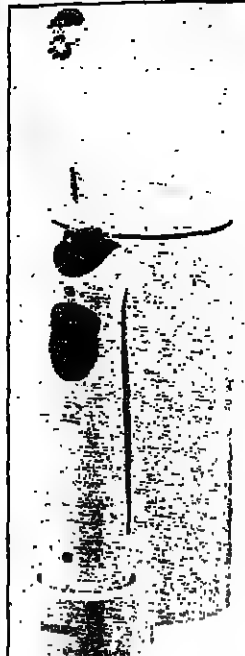
that image, to frighten people away before they find out I'm frightened of them."

Although she travels extensively on business, Picasso is no longer interested in leading a relentless social life. "I no longer want to go out to parties," she says. "That's one

reason why I left New York — to get away from the social pressure. These days I am quite happy to stay in and watch television."

● *Guinevere Antiques*, 574-580 King's Road, London SW6 2DY (0171-736 2917). Open: Mon-Fri, 9.30am-6pm, Sat 10am-5.30pm.

GADGETS



High-tech tooth care

DAZZLING smiles in Hollywood tend to be like *Baywatch* suntans: fake. Dentists in Los Angeles are doing a roaring trade bleaching teeth whiter-than-white, but if that seems a bit drastic you could just try cleaning them with Philips's Jordan 2-Action plaque removing electric toothbrush.

Attached to a chunky body, the brush has two small heads, which oscillate independently for optimum cleaning power in and around teeth and gums. It has two speeds: the slower one gentler on sensitive teeth.

The Jordan feels too big for even my mouth, and using it seems impossible without dribbling like a baby. It does leave you orally refreshed — only the hefty price tag leaves a nasty taste in the mouth.

THE "hyG Ionic" toothbrush runs on a small battery and claims to remove plaque by changing the polarity of your teeth. Apparently our teeth have a negative polarity and the brush makes them positive. I put this to my dentist, nicknamed Lil (as in "The Drill"), and she laughed it off as a gimmick. She recommends daily brushing with a regular, decent brush.

TIM WAPSHOTT

● *Philips Jordan 2-Action electric toothbrush*, £39.95 from Philips (0181-899 2166). *hyG Ionic toothbrush*, £19.99, plus p&p, from The Leading Edge (0171-499 7891).

BARGAINS

There are bargains to be had at markets, boot sales, junk shops and stalls all over the country. With £100, what would you buy?

RECKONED by the British Tourist Authority to be London's fourth biggest tourist attraction, Camden Lock Market is a youth culture magnet loaded with Sixties memorabilia.

Collectors converge on Camden Lock in search of pop records, ceramics, even relics of pop history such as old training shoes. This obsessive's market can drive up prices. There is a shop in Camden Lock called Caveat Emptor, and this principle should be observed at all times. Equally, haggle with stallholders, who may well be able to let things go for a lot less.

Most visitors just stroll around savouring the atmosphere. But then part of the fun is buying things spontaneously. My £100 bought these curiosities:



Camden booty: and all for £100

● An old book on English furniture, £3. A house music compilation tape, £5. Taped badly from the radio, it was a bit of a waste. But a Jimi Hendrix video was a good buy at £8.50. A kitschy vase for £5 was reasonable enough. More substantial was an Indian tabla drum for £38, reduced by a tenner. I was also pleased with a British Piccadilly aluminium teapot for £20, a good price, as they can go for quite a lot more. Finally and somewhat inevitably, a pair of second-hand jeans, £20. Total: £99.50.

OLIVER BENNETT

It'll be all fright on the night

HALLOWE'EN

Hey-ho for Halloween. All the witches to be seen. Some in black and some in green. Hey-ho for Halloween!

ON FRIDAY, there will be witches and monsters, hobgoblins and ghosts flitting in the moonlight, yelling rhymes, putting out sticky little paws, and scaring neighbours into handing over ghostly treats. Forget Guy Fawkes: in the past few years, the British traditions of gunpowder and sedition have been replaced by an American-style fervour for Halloween — the eve of All Saint's Day.

The festival has all the hallmarks of American excess — almost £2.5 billion a year is spent there celebrating. And despite warnings from vicars who see the festival as satanic, and the publication of a booklet by the Association of Christian Teachers persuading parents to divert children into more saintly activities, Halloween has become almost as big here as Easter.

Every large supermarket chain has a range of festive trick-or-treat goodies, and there are dressing-up shops selling or hiring out clothing, from hand-made ones at Party Party (0171-267 9084) and American Importer Circus Circus (0171-731 4128), to basic kits from the high street.

If you have left it too late to shop yourself, help is at hand on the Internet, through Yell, the Yellow Pages website (<http://www.yell.co.uk>). Here, you will find lists of fancy-dress shops, make-up suppliers and stores offering delivery. Whatever the scaremongers say about evil influences, Halloween is a time for fun. The children we photographed here really got into the spirit: the cats miaowing and hissing, the ghosts howling, and the monsters and Darth Vader lashing out with their lasers. There was only one ghastly scene — when the costumes had to come off.

LISA GRAINGER

BACK ROW (from left): Eve, 9, wears Darth Vader costume, £44.99; and comes a Star Wars light sabre, £9.99, from The American Party Store (0171-493 2678); Trick or treat bag, £3.99, from Marks & Spencer; Francesca, 9, wears a ghost costume, £25, from Mardi Gras (0181-597 4351); and plastic ghost hands, £2.99, from Safeway (01622 712987); her twin, Stevie, turns into a monster, £25, from Mardi Gras, and carries a skull candy-grabber, £1.29, from Tesco (0800 505355).

CENTRE ROW: Amy Jane, 5, wears a feline-fur tiger costume, £22.95, from The Hill Toy Company (0171-937 8797); Inflatable Pumpkin, £8.99, from The American Party Store; Hollie, 6, wears the Pumpkin Pie Costume, £15.99, from The American Party Store (as above); and comes a plastic light-up trick or treat camera, £2.99, from Safeway.

FRONT ROW: Fica, 2, turns into a witch, £24.99, from Selfridges (0171-629 1234) on her broomstick, £3.95, from Hill Toy Company; Jo, 2, wears the pirate costume, £14.95, from The Hill Toy Company and carries a plastic trident, 49p, from The American Party Store; Daisy, 5, poses as a cat, £24 (add £3.50 for p&p), from Hopsclotch (0181-674 9853).

Styling by Jennifer Rüggeberg and Lisa Grainger. Photograph by Des Jensen



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Glamorous fakes set the fur flying

Since the campaign of the Eighties which declared that it takes 40 dumb animals to make a fur coat and only one to wear it, fur has been distinctly un-PC in Britain. It may have appeared in 150 designers' autumn/winter collections, but in a recent Mori poll nine out of ten Britons said they would not wear it. Harrods was forced to close its fur department in 1990; exclusive furriers in Knightsbridge continue to be attacked; and even Imperial Cancer Research charity shops refuse to stock it.

Although real pelts have been flaunted alongside fake ones by British designers such as Hardy Amies and Tomasz Starzewski, and modelled for Fendi furriers by former anti-fur campaigner Naomi Campbell, fashion does not always translate onto the streets. We are a nation of animal lovers, and those who kill for beauty are high on the list of British hates.

Hence the plethora of fakes in the shops — on collars and cuffs, on short bomber jackets, on flyaway, long-haired stoles and bear-like full-length coats.

It is not just the leopard-skin fakes that stalked the streets last year. This season there are mono-chrome sweaters with long-haired cuffs tipped in white; short-haired burgundy collars on brown suede jackets; mock mink on golden wool coats. The fur is short and fluffy, long and straggly, black and glossy, or even dyed in blues, magentas and golds.

Thanks to fabric-makers' abilities to create realistic fakes, it is possible to achieve the glamorous effect of previous eras, when it was the ultimate in chic to drape a fur stole over your shoulders, to sweep into a hotel under a luxurious cloud of mink, or to nuzzle into a collar of rabbit fluff.

Italian women can wear what they like on the streets of Milan, but the British are leading the way in showing where we like our animals. And it isn't on our backs.

LISA GRAINGER



TOP: chocolate stretch moleskin trousers, £85, and jacket with fake-fur collar, £125, by Glant, from Selfridges, W1, and John Lewis and House of Fraser stores nationwide (0171-255 3007)

ABOVE: grey, black and white striped wrap cardigan with tie belt and black fake-fur trim, £59, from Kookai, branches nationwide (0171-937 4411)

LEFT: full-length ivory and gold brocade coat with blond fake-fur trim, £160, by Lipsy from selected Top Shop stores nationwide or mail order (0171-263 6208). Chocolate trousers, £34.99, from Jeffrey Rogers branches nationwide (01923 474400). Red suede high-heeled mules, £110, from Russell & Bromley, 24-25 New Bond Street, W1 (0171-629 6903)

Photographs by RICHARD BURNS



TOP LEFT: long camel tie-belt coat with grey fake-fur collar, £295, from Whistles, 12 St Christopher's Place, W1, and branches nationwide (0171-487 4484). Tan square-toed shoes, £79.99, from Ravel, (0171-436 3125)

LEFT: black wool knee-length coat with grey fake-fur collar, £1,360, by Givenchy, from Harvey Nichols, Knightsbridge, SW1 (0171-235 5000). Black stretch lace vest, £35, The Collection at Etam, from selected Etam stores (0171-494 7729). Stretch lace skirt, £69, by Kevan Jon, 30 Byram Arcade, Westgate, Huddersfield HD1 1ND, or by mail order on 01484 456 312. Black suede high-heeled ankle boots, £155, from Russell & Bromley, 24-25 New Bond Street, W1 (0171-629 6903)

FAR LEFT: navy coat with burgundy fake-fur collar, £125, The Collection at Etam, as before

Make-up by Sally Kvalheim for Jo Hansford (0171-495 7774) Styling by Annalip Uppal

THREE OF A KIND

BLACK polo necks are a must for winter. Here are three of the best.

LEFT: cashmere and silk-mix short-sleeved turtleneck, £245, Press & Bachman (0171-636 1614). CENTRE: chunky rib-knit, £40, Warehouse (0171-278 3469). RIGHT: classic lambswool, £49.50, The Scotchhouse, (0171-581 2151)



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Horticultural therapy: just what the doctor ordered

Green fingers, clear mind

Gardening helps people unwind from the rigours of everyday life and is a perfect therapy for the mind. Sue Corbett reports

Just what is it about gardens that makes gardeners — and garden visitors — feel so good? For the writer and historian Sir Roy Strong, tending his large formal garden at the Laskett on the Herefordshire/Wales border is a creative act. "It's a tuning-in to nature but also a controlling of nature," he says. "You can please and trim and change things and make great compositions. All that gives me unbelievable satisfaction. Gardens also keep you mobile and allow you to breathe good air."

And I'm a great believer in the fact that, if you have a problem, the subconscious takes over while you're doing something like digging. Then, when you go back to the computer afterwards, you find the problem has solved itself."

Lesley Talbot, director of the Thanet branch of the mental health charity Mind finds gardening unbeatable therapy for people with mental health problems. "The peace and quiet of our garden helps them to somehow unburden themselves a little," she says.

"While they garden, they unwind and sometimes things come to the fore that don't necessarily do so in an ordinary counselling session. People feel able to talk more freely."

Bill Collings, general manager of forensic psychiatric services for Southampton Community Health NHS Trust, runs four greenhouses and an allotment for 50 people with mental health problems.

"Horticultural therapy has a tremendous amount to offer," he

says. "One person who had hardly spoken for two years started to come every day to work on our project. Now he has even appeared on television talking about it and how it saved him from staring at four walls."

Gardening as therapy for people with mental health problems is a growth area for the Somerset-based charity Horticultural Therapy (HT). Staff find that simple jobs such as seed-sowing are popular with mentally ill clients, and they encourage them by putting their names on labels in the seed trays so that they can follow the plants through to flowering.

"If someone can't settle, we'll do something specific like moving dry plants out of the greenhouse to water them," says Richard Jones, demonstrator at the HT garden in Battersea Park, London. "Plants have to be tended — so it takes the focus away from that person and helps them to concentrate. Watering is always therapeutic."

Even being confined to a wheelchair need not mean the end of gardening pleasures. Fred Warden, horticultural therapy technician at Mary Marlborough Centre, Headington, Oxford, uses a wheelchair and says that when people see him, they realise there is hope. For just

E25 a session (free on the NHS to some clients), Mr Warden advises people with severe physical disabilities on how to remain active in their gardens.

"If you really love your garden and it's your life and suddenly you can't do it, you get very depressed," he says.

I give advice on garden design, as well as the right tools, equipment and techniques. I spend a couple of hours talking to people. Then we choose one of the 150-odd tools we keep here, and I get them to use it in our garden. Needless to say, everything around here gets pretty well pruned."

In its different way, Mr Warden's gardening work is every bit as satisfying as Sir Roy Strong's. Overjoyed clients send him vegetables, and one woman who surmounted her difficulties with his help, went on to win a competition for the best garden in her town.

• A Garden for You: A Practical Guide to Tools, Equipment and Design for Older People and People with Disabilities by Fred Warden, is available from the Disabled Living Foundation, 380-44 Harrow Road, London W9 2HL, price £5.95, including p&p.
• Mary Marlborough Centre, Windmill Road, Headington, Oxford OX3 7LD (01865 741155).
• Horticultural Therapy, Coulsdon Ground, Vallis Way, Frome, Somerset BA11 3DW (01373 466782).
• Mind, 15-19 Broadway, London E15 4BQ (0181-519 2122).

Plant grapevines in rich, well-manured soil, in a sunny position, and erect posts and wires for subsequent training. Protect against the cold during this first winter.

Shorten any long, gangling stems on shrub roses to reduce wind rock. Floribunda roses that have finished flowering may be given the same treatment.

If not completed earlier, just after flowering time, rambler roses can have flowered stems removed and new stems tied into position.

Take 12in hardwood cuttings of buddleia, cut-leaved or purple elders, forsythia, willow, flowering currant, gooseberries, and red.



WEEKEND TIPS

white and blackcurrants. Set the cuttings, two-thirds buried, in a nursery row and leave them there for the first year. All will grow quickly in the first year.

Make any late cuts of the lawn a little longer than usual, 1in-2in, to strengthen the

grass for winter. Choose a dry and preferably windy day, and make sure all clippings are boxed or raked off to minimise disease.

Place a cloche over a row of parsley to keep up supplies for Christmas. Tired plants may be revived with a gentle application of nitrogenous fertiliser.

Cut down the ferny stems of asparagus and clear away, removing any weeds growing at the base.

Plant out cloves of garlic on light, warm soils. 6in apart. For good cropping, it is important to establish the plants in the autumn. On cold, heavy soils, keep in pots in a cold greenhouse for planting out in spring.

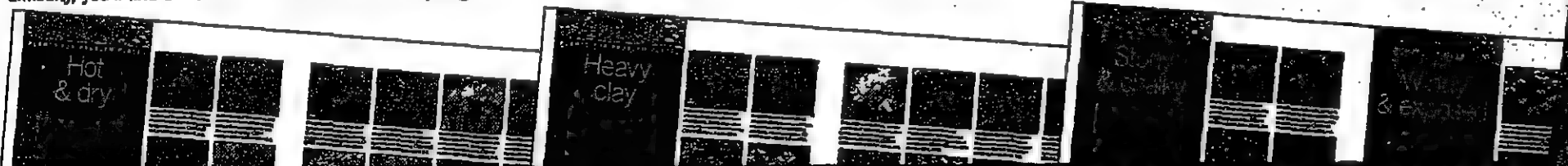
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GARDEN ANSWERS



STEPHEN ANDERTON
replies to readers' letters

Q Can you identify a plant found growing in a freshwater ditch near the sea in the Orkneys? It has 2-ft flower stems with dense clusters of 1-2-in white daisies with yellow centres at the top. The leaves are dark, shiny green, and a few clasp the stem too. — M. Rider, Chelmsford, Essex.

A I recognise this from your picture as *Senecio smithii*, a designer groundsel for midsummer. It is a terrific plant. In Britain, the further north you go the better it gets. It enjoys cool and wet conditions, and apparently grows wild in ditches in the Falklands. I grew it in ordinary, dryish border soil in Northumberland, but at the foot of a short north-facing wall. In the hotter, drier parts of the south, it tends to grow shorter and never looks quite so healthy. It would look very sad in my dry Essex garden, but if you give it plenty of humidity, it might grow well. You could try *Microseris ringens*, too. It is a shorter version of *S. smithii*, with similar clusters of yellow flowers, and it is a little less perturbed by life down south.

Q My daughter-in-law is hooked on gardening, and last weekend my husband and I organised a compost heap for her. The grandchildren have a rabbit, and I wonder if the waste from the hutch could go on the heap, or would it pose a health risk? — G. Staveley, Hull.

A Go ahead. Only be careful that you do not get so much carbon-rich material together in the

heap that it does not heat up and rot. Open up and crumple the hutch newspapers. The nitrogen-rich rabbit urine will speed things up, but some kitchen waste would help to keep it active. Why not get another rabbit or 20, to speed up compost production?

Q A beech tree in my garden is getting too big and I would like to pollard it, both to control its size and as a long-term source of firewood. The tree has a single trunk to 6ft 4in, then many shoots, suggesting it has been pollarded many years ago. Would it survive pollarding again, when should it be done, and should I cut through the main trunk or through the old pollard shoots, ie, just below or just above the previous cuts? — E. Beaumont, Fareham, Hants.

A Pollarding — cutting all the branches back to the trunk to re-grow — is a winter job, before the sap begins to rise again. The more regularly it is done (10-15 years), the better a tree responds and survives. A pollarded tree which has been allowed to grow on again for 30-100 years can often be repollarded, but the shock can be fatal. Beech is not pleased to be pollarded, and cuts made across major limbs often do not respond at all. I would leave your beech alone, or replace it with a more co-operative species.

Q Write to Garden Answers, Weekend, The Times, 1 Pennington St, London E1 9XN. Advice is offered without legal responsibility. The Times regrets that enclosures cannot be returned.

A hero for England on the field tells Jane Owen why he will not tackle backyard brambles



Victor Ubogu has plans to host a few parties at the courtyard of his home in Bath (left and below) — but first there is the small matter of clearing away the tangled overgrowth

Quiet place away from the scrum

ME AND MY GARDEN: VICTOR UBOGU

Victor Ubogu, the opera-loving England rugby squad player whose naked bottom has on more than one occasion wowed the crowds during Grand Slam matches, makes his staggering announcement nonchalantly as we slash our way to his garden through swathes of underwear and clothes strewn across his bedroom floor.

"I am going to give up wine, women and song," he says. Just like that. There are crates of good champagne upstairs. Women keep ringing on both his mobile phones. The Met will probably fold without his patronage. So has life with a yellow Lotus and a bottomless wallet become too meaningless and shallow?

"It is for the sake of Oxford's Fast Food Day on Friday, November 14. If I am playing on the Saturday I can't give up food like most people, but I will not take anyone out that night and I'll give the money I've saved to Oxford," says the man who claims to

know only one flower — the white orchid. "I buy them to send to people."

Mr Ubogu is master of a small overgrown courtyard in central Bath, where he lives in an elegant three-storey stone house. He moved here in June from a cottage on Kew Green, west London, which gave him regular access to Kew Gardens, his favourite place to "chill out" between rugby and his business interests.

These include a London bar called Shoeless Joe's and a security firm, which he has since left to turn professional, return to the England rugby squad and focus on the 1999 World Cup. "I had to cut down on my interests — I am not getting any younger," says the 33-year-old with the roar of laughter that punctuates almost everything he says.

He leads the way out into the 25ft by 15ft courtyard, through some particularly vicious brambles, to

reveal his plans. It is not an easy plot — shaded by a right-angle of high Bath stone buildings, and damp with little air movement but a good, slightly alkaline soil.

"I want to find out who owns the garden next door and buy it. It is even more overgrown than mine," he says. "Then I'll pierce an arch through the wall. One garden would be for parties and the other, next door, would be to chill out in, with a bench for me to sit on and read."

The chill-out garden would be planted with soporific herbs and a voluptuous planting to give the effect of a rainforest. "I grew up in Nigeria, where it is lush, wild and beautiful," says the 16-stone Oxford blue who has lived in Britain since 1977.

His Bath garden must have been presentable at one time, but bramble, ivy, bindweed and creeping butter-

cup have just about smothered a planting of silver prostrate *Juniper squamata*, cherry, honeysuckle, an *Acer palmatum*, wisteria, clematis, hart's-tongue and hellebore.

Mr Ubogu frowns at his Bath stone paving and says he will replace it with terracotta tiles, build a barbecue in the centre of the small walled garden and make raised stone-edged beds around the perimeter.

"Because I'm quite colourful," says Mr Ubogu with glorious understatement. "I like plenty of bright colours so I want lots of colourful plants in the raised beds."

Mr Ubogu's garden plans have a certain theatricality. "I like the overgrown look and I'll put in some strategically placed lighting — subtle, low lighting for parties."

Most surprising is his plan for a stone grotto at the far end of his party garden. "I just want somewhere I can hide away, especially during parties."

More roars of laughter. "And I want a statue of Belgium's *Manneken Pis*," he says with post-modernist irony.

Mr Ubogu says he has neither the knowledge nor the time to do the garden himself. "I haven't thought in depth about who should do the garden. I've got to sort out the inside first — I mean look at it."

There is a certain informality in Mr Ubogu's house — clothing scattered where it lands — and, in his bare-boarded office, computers, electronic equipment and an awesome array of trainers sprout across the floor.

But, given the chance, who wouldn't swap a little house pride for a life of wine, women and opera? It was on a rugby tour of Australia that Mr Ubogu fell in love with opera. After being persuaded to see *La Bohème* at the Sydney Opera House, he was won over, and now he is a regular opera-goer, with purist taste. Quite a conversion for a rugby international.

For more information about the Oxford Fast Food Day call 01453 55783 or 0990 084225.

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LONDON

Building work is also about to start on the site of the old dockyard, which will eventually provide 650 flats and houses. The centrepiece of the development by Fairview New Homes is a seven-storey block of designer luxury flats with river



The team moves out next month and building work will start soon after, with the phased development completed by 2002.



Most of the villa has yet to be excavated, but the work was forced to a premature halt when the house



Although recognised as an important archaeological site, the villa is not protected by English Heritage. When the house is eventually sold there will be nothing to stop

The house, known locally as Thatched Cottage, dates from the 14th century and is believed to have been built from stone taken from the villa. It was put on the market

[REDACTED]

According to English Heritage there are an estimated 2600 archaeological digs in Britain ranging from small local projects to large sites of national importance. The Thatched Cottage is not the only house with archaeologists at the bottom of the garden, but not all householders would choose to open their garden to researchers. The chances are you will not be

However, new buildings sometimes have to be built on piles rather than conventional foundations so as to minimise the damage to the remains below, putting up the cost of construction.

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The old
hall wit
a star
billing



Mere Hall, a quintessentially English country house dating from the 16th century, is in 85 acres and has five reception rooms, six principal bedrooms and an asking price of £1.5 million

The old hall with a star billing

Mere Hall, setting for *Shadowlands* and inspiration for *Grey Gables* in *The Archers*, is for sale

The wardrobes are not for sale. And on my visit to Mere Hall I did not, in fact, crawl inside one to see if I might find myself swept behind the coats into a mysterious wood lit by a solitary lamppost. I suppose it would have been doubtful: the hall's connection to *Narnia* is not exactly direct — four years ago the film crew of *Shadowlands* swept down on it for a day and Anthony Hopkins strode down the drive impersonating C.S. Lewis. But the hall is rather a magical place, none the less.

It is little wonder that Sir Richard Attenborough chose the house as the epitome of an English estate. Driving through the suburbs of Britain one sees enough plumb-straight modern "half-timbering" to put you off the look for life. But Mere Hall, near Droitwich in Worcestershire, is listed Grade II and is one of the finest houses of its kind in the country. It is a reminder of the eccentric beauty of this quintessentially English style.

You can see the house as soon as you turn down the drive; once its face was obscured by a stand of elms, but Dutch elm disease killed them off and now limes and poplars are slowly growing to replace them. The house is striking, black and white against the green of the Worcestershire



Anthony Hopkins and Debra Winger in *Shadowlands*, shot at Mere Hall

countryside. Its interior, too, has a film-set quality, but no set designer had laid a hand on the dark Elizabethan panelling that lines many of the ground-floor rooms.

When we arrived there was no one, at first, to meet us: but the great wooden front door was open, and inside there was a fire blazing in the hearth and plate of biscuits set out on the table. A deer's head, mounted on the panelling above the fireplace, cast a baleful eye on us — but not so malevolent, perhaps, as those of the fine dragons carved into the wood.

This fire surround is one of several on the ground: the best is in the dining room, a voluptuous concoction decorated with winding vines and bare-breasted caryatids; in the sitting room, mythical Green Men peer out at the visitor.

Until a few years ago, many of the visitors were *Archers* fans, because the Grey Gables country house hotel was modelled on Mere Hall.

That the house has so many original features is in part because it remained in the

same family for more than 600 years. The present owners, the Stearns, have loved and cared for it for 16 years, and are only the third owners. From its earliest incarnation in 1337 (a beam with this date carved into it can just be made out over the front door, but may have been added at a later date since the house's face is clearly 16th century) it belonged to the Bearcrofts, who built it and owned all the land around. A portrait of the last Colonel Bearcroft hangs in the hall; the Jack Russell at his feet is buried in the garden. That the

main rooms of the house are in such good shape is probably due to this continuity, though when the Stearns bought it the house had fallen into disrepair and needed restoration.

Edward and Anita Stearn have twin daughters who have grown and gone, which is why they are selling the house. The guide price of £1.5 million includes the house — with its five reception rooms, six principal bedrooms, a separate wing with three more bedrooms and a maze of attic rooms — and 85 acres of land, much of it woodland; plus tennis courts, a pool, stabling and formal gardens, with the lake that gives the house its name. There is potential for planning permission to build a lodge.

Despite its size it feels a liveable house: the bedrooms, with their Georgian panelling, are comfortable rather than grand. The kitchen/breakfast room — where sections of the old wattle-and-daub walling have been exposed and covered with glass — is heated by an enormous red Aga, and is the kind of room you never want to leave. Hooks for hanging hams protrude from the exposed beams. Nothing makes quite a straight line. At the top of the house, where the attic rooms create

the illusion of an Elizabethan "long gallery" when viewed from the outside (Nikolaus Pevsner thought this a very clever trick), there is a warren of storage rooms, some too low to stand up in.

Upstairs, too, is the mechanism for the striking clock built by John Moore and Sons of Clerkenwell in the 19th century which still chimes the hour from a cupola above the front door. Ticking gently for more than a century in a low-ceilinged room scented with plaster and wood, the beautiful clock, as much as anything in the house, seems a link to a vanished and shadowy past.

ERICA WAGNER

Agents: Jackson-Stops and Staff (01386 840224) and Quantrells (0121 354 9229)



Above: details from the hall's decoration

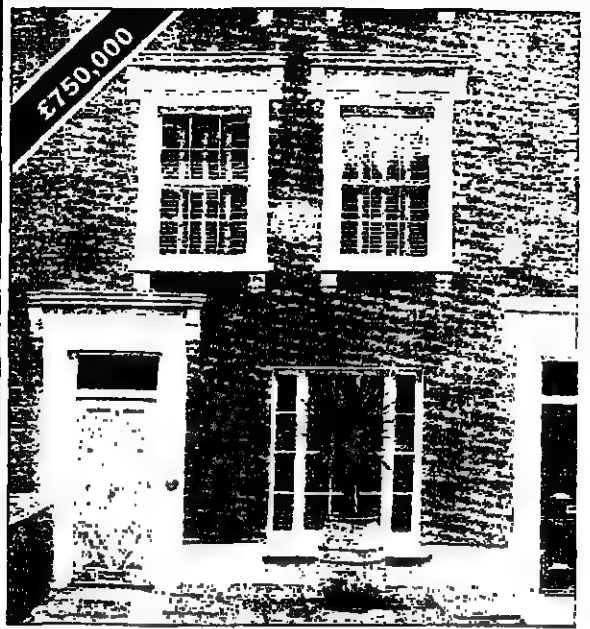
Left: the panelling dining room also has a superb carved fire surround.

HOME SWAP

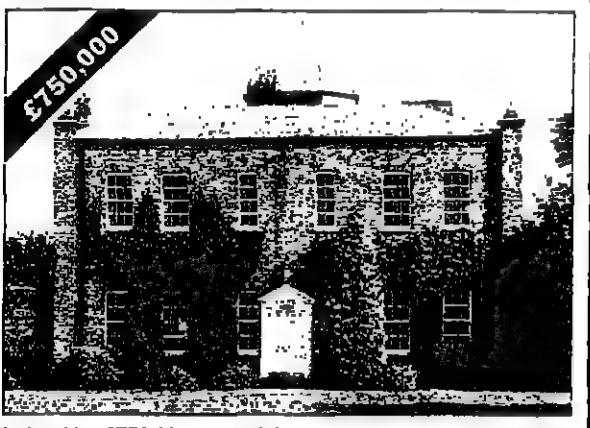
A shortage of good houses for sale in Fulham, west London, fuelled price gains of up to 20 per cent in the first half of this year. With more property on the market, city buyers are no longer prepared to pay over the odds to secure the right house and prices have stabilised. The smartest address on the Peterborough estate will set you back up to £900,000 for a five-bedroom Victorian terrace house. Around Hurlingham and Bishops Park, large semi-detached Edwardian houses fetch from £500,000 to £1.25 million.

Hot spots in Suffolk include the river Stour valley-Constable country around East Bergholt, Higham and Dedham. Just over the border in Essex, timber-framed medieval houses with up to six bedrooms from £300,000 to £500,000 are selling fast to London buyers who commute from Colchester to Liverpool Street in 50 minutes. Georgian country houses with up to ten acres cost from £500,000 to £1 million following price increases of up to 20 per cent this year, according to estate agent Savills.

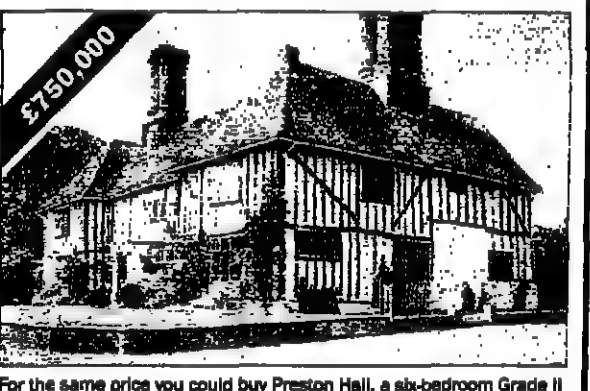
There is a distinct lack of froth on the property market in Cheshire. However, period country houses in Manchester's former stockbroker belt, around Alderley Edge, Knutsford and Prestbury, costing from £600,000 to £1.25 million, continue to attract successful business people and prices have risen 10 per cent this year. In the Peckforton Hills, around Tarporley, a six-bedroom country house in 10 acres can be still had from £450,000, says Strutt & Parker.



This imaginatively transformed four-bedroom Victorian terrace house in Rumbold Road, Fulham, west London — once the home of actor Kenneth Moore and still owned by his widow Angela Douglas and Bill Bryden — is for sale at £750,000. It has a 60ft walled garden and two garages (Savills, 0171 591 5725).



In Cheshire, £750,000 will buy Whitcroft Hall, a five-bedroom Grade II* listed Georgian house in 13 acres of garden and paddocks, in an attractive rural location, bordering the Trent and Mersey Canal, near Northwich, 24 miles from Manchester (Strutt & Parker, 01244 320747).



For the same price you could buy Preston Hall, a six-bedroom Grade II listed Elizabethan manor house in 11 acres of walled gardens and paddocks, overlooking undulating countryside, near Levensham, Suffolk. It comes with stabling, tack room, barn, garage, heated swimming pool and summerhouse (Savills, 01473 226191).

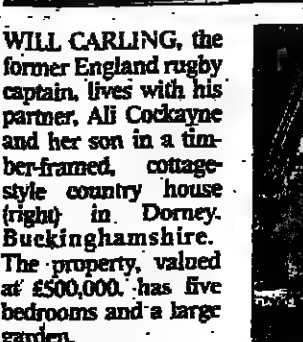
CHERYL TAYLOR

FAMOUS TIMBERS

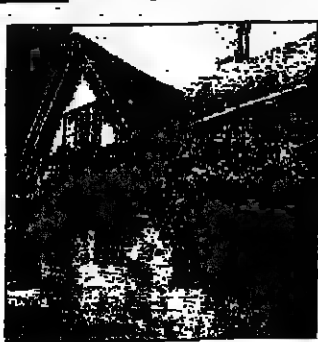
TERESA GORMAN, Conservative MP for Billericay, lives in a Grade II listed Tudor farmhouse (right) in Orsett, Essex. The semi-detached 15th-century house was bought for £170,000, and more than £130,000 has been spent on the property.



RUFFORD Old Hall, Rufford, Lancashire (left), a half-timbered manor house built in 1420, was bequeathed by the First Baron Hesketh to the National Trust in 1936. Today only the main hall survives in its original form but it is said that Shakespeare once performed there.



WILL CARLING, the former England rugby captain, lives with his partner, Ali Cockayne and her son in a timber-framed, cottage-style country house (right) in Dorset, Buckinghamshire. The property, valued at £500,000, has five bedrooms and a large garden.

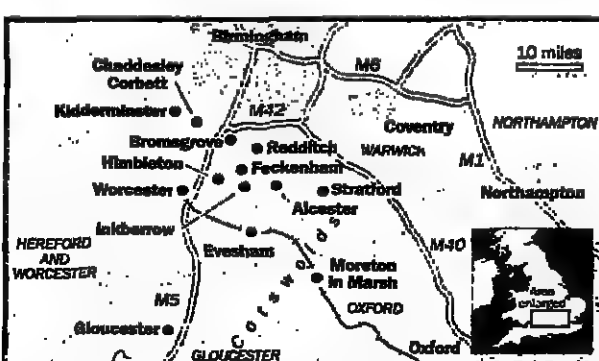


MARKET COMMENT

THE WEST MIDLANDS market is a broad regional one, stretching from Worcester and the M5 to Stratford-upon-Avon and the M40 in the east, and from the M42 south towards the Cotswolds.

But the dominant players here are the indigenous population and Birmingham-based business people: the area has enjoyed strong economic growth recently, attracting a flow of professionals relocating from the South East. With rail journeys from London to Worcester taking between three and four hours, the area remains largely beyond the pale for London commuters and the Cotswold/Gloucestershire weekend-cottage brigade (though proximity to the Cotswold line linking Paddington to Worcester and Hereford is an undoubted attraction for buyers).

As a consequence, it has not seen the development of the "honeypot" villages (Broadway, Bourton-on-the-Water, the Slaughters) that pull such crowds of hopeful purchasers and tourists in the Cotswolds, and this makes for a price differential of about 15 per cent, says Kevin Mason of the estate agents Knight Frank. But he adds that an increasing number of buyers with more



flexible working arrangements, able to spend longer out of the South East or work from home, are being seduced by the relative value for money they can find in the area.

Lower prices apply across the board: Peter Britton of Jackson-Stops & Staff believes that Mere Hall (see above), on the market at £1.5 million, would have seen a guide price of £2 million-plus if it had been in Gloucestershire, attracting a wider wealthy contingent from London and the Home Counties. Given the West Midlands location, however, he believes that interest in a Grade I property like this is likely to come either from the well-heeled burghers of Birmingham or from specialist purchasers around the country who are on the hunt for a gem.

Further down the scale, a

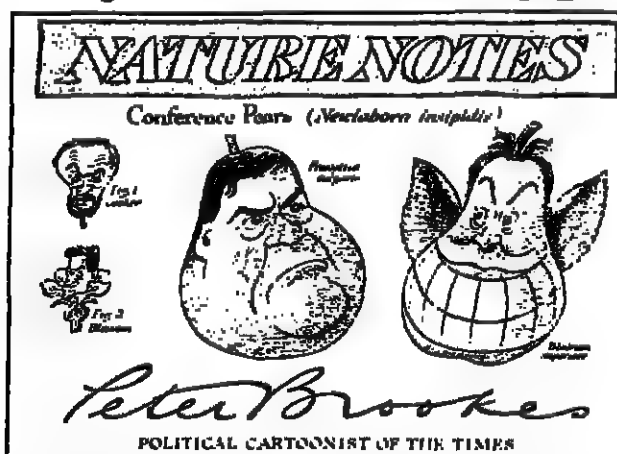
mid-range country house with five to seven bedrooms and two to 15 acres of land will sell in the West Midlands for £300,000 to £600,000. A three-bedroom cottage with a pretty garden (prime weekend material), in a popular spot such as Feckenham, Inkborrow, Himbleton or the area around Chaddesley Corbett, could be picked up for £150,000 to £210,000.

But agents emphasise that the regional market, while strong, is not speculative: there is keen interest in quality, well-maintained properties, but not at any price. Nor is there much sign of a renovation renaissance: today's buyers would rather pay well for mod cons and everything in full working order than rebuild a ruined bargain.

FAITH GLASGOW

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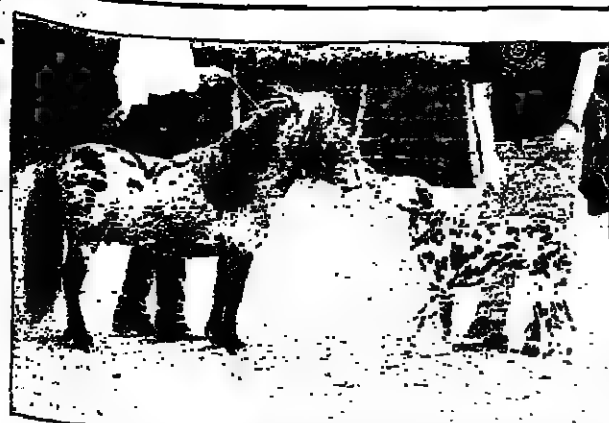
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Some owners treat miniatures like dogs, says the RSPCA

'It's not a glorified lawnmower'

Like a beautiful race-horse seen through the wrong end of a telescope or a stocky table with a leg on each corner. "So cute they make you go weak at the knees" or "an abomination — a horse reduced to the size of a Labrador".

Miniature horses, bred over the years to be small, cute and petite, polarise opinion in the world of horse-lovers.

But one thing is certain — little horses are big business. The smaller they come, the bigger the price. To be classed as miniature, they have to be 34in high or less, and they don't come any tinier than at the toyhorse stud run by Tikki Adorian, who is staging the biggest British auction of miniatures today.

Mrs Adorian is chairman of the British Miniature Horse Society, which she founded in 1992 with one member. Now the BMHS has 1,500 horses on its books. She has bred, and still owns, the tiniest horse in the world: toyhorse Countess Natashka. 27in high and known as Tushie.

Today, hundreds of people are expected to see Tushie and other miniatures at her stud farm at Howick, near Billingshurst, West Sussex, and some will be prepared to pay from £250 to several thousand pounds to own one. However, anybody wanting to

Miniature horses may be cute, but it's feared some people want them for the wrong reasons, says Jack Crossley

tempt Mrs Adorian to part with Tushie would have pay about £10,000.

Lin Whitehouse, from Essex, is prepared to spend £3,000. "I bought two toy horses six years ago, thinking they would be fun — and useful to mow the lawn," she says. "But owning miniature horses turned out to be contagious and now I can't wait to get to the auction again."

As well as being "cute" and "a lovely mover", a good quality miniature Shetland will have a short, strong back and powerful hind legs and hocks (knees — where the propulsion comes from). But there are those who fear that the fashion for breeding "fine"

miniatures might be going too far, sacrificing strength for beauty. When Mrs Adorian's 30in Count Cappuccino became this year's supreme champion, judge Anthony Thomas Chambers told me: "I was looking for beauty and strength, perhaps 50-50. Breeders who go for fitness often reduce strength."

Mr Chambers's concern is echoed by the RSPCA, which is worried that breeding from a small gene pool may cause genetic disorders.

"Some people wish to obtain miniature horses because they can have them in the house or the car and treat them in a manner more appropriate for a dog," says Mr Chambers.

IF YOU intend to buy a miniature it is worth considering the advice in the guidelines for first-time buyers, printed in the Toyhorse auction catalogue. ■ Miniatures should be treated exactly the same as other equines. ■ They need ample nourishment from grassland between April

FACT FILE

and November. When stabled, feed them on quality hay, coarse horse-mix or a mixture of soaked sugar beet and crushed oats in very small amounts — 1-3lb per feed depending on age and size. Parasite control is

recommended every eight weeks and horses need regular pairing. ■ At Howick, weanlings are generally stabled at night but nearly all other stock is wintered in sheltered pastures. ■ Should a young colt become rather a handful, it may well benefit from being gelded.

and horses because of their size, and the RSPCA believes that this may lead to welfare problems for the animals. Lucy Wykeham, from the International League for the Protection of Horses, says: "I think you run into congenital problems if you are miniaturising something all the time. Some miniatures being bred now are about the size of a Labrador and it is getting ridiculous."

"The ILPH asks people not to buy miniatures as pets. Many are bred for showing, and perhaps that is where their future lies — but not as a glorified lawnmower. Any horse is a commitment — fees can add up to £1,500 a year."

But Mrs Adorian says the costs are different for every owner: "£1,500 a year is nonsense. £300 is nearer the mark," she says. "As for concerns about genetic disorders, that's scare-mongering. We have a 24-hour helpline and people may ring us up with any problem. None has been linked to genetic disorders."

Should children ride them? Never, say some. Only children below four stone, say others. A strong, fit miniature will enjoy carrying up to seven stone, says Mrs Adorian. Should they pull people in carriages? Not desirable, say some. Again, Mrs Adorian disagrees — and is holding a two-day driving school on November 11 and 18.



Above: Tikki Adorian with her prize miniature. Unlike the RSPCA, she says toyhorses can be ridden and used to pull carriages



Left: Rebecca Lewis, 6, puts her horse, Lewingale Peanut, through its paces

Gray Fawkes is almost upon us, and, like thousands of pet owners, I have to look forward to a fraught week — or more. My two cats retire to one of the bedrooms when the hangers start but Bessie, my Cocker spaniel, is terrified. She covers underneath the settee, trembles and cannot settle. My vet says he can give me tranquillisers for her if I insist but doesn't think this solves anything. What should I do?

It isn't reasonable to keep Bessie tranquillised for a week, and tranquillisers can't be switched on and off as and when the hangers stop and start. Close the curtains at dusk. Switch the radio or TV on to high volume to provide a counter-noise. Give Bessie a bigger supper than normal. A full stomach is a wonderful sedative. Keep calm yourself — dogs respond to their owner's reactions. When she goes out just before bedtime, keep her on the lead and make sure her collar is tight enough — dogs slip out of loose collars. And tell Bessie she's a disgrace to Gundogs. Bangs from gunshots are part of their lives. Excitement is acceptable, but terror — never.

My cat Sooky keeps getting tapeworms although I worm her every three months. The vet says she will keep getting worms so long as she has fleas. I don't understand the connection.

The common tapeworm of cats, *Dipylidium*, has a two-stage lifecycle. The adult worms live in cats but the juvenile form is a cyst within a flea. The melon-seed-shaped wriggly segments you see around Sooky's rear end are

ripe segments, full of eggs, detached from the tail of the tapeworm. They dry up, the eggs are shed, and when a flea eats an egg, a tapeworm cyst develops in the flea. Then Sooky swallows this infected flea and the next generation of *Dipylidium* grows in her intestine. Which is why flea control is essential.

A different tapeworm infects hunting cats — one of the *Taenia* species. The cyst stage occurs in a shrew or vole which has swallowed tapeworm eggs passed by a cat. When this infected shrew is caught and eaten by the cat, a *Taenia* tapeworm develops.

Carry on with the worming, but remember that tapeworms don't cause ill-health in cats.

What's the best bedding for a tortoise hibernation box? Last year we used hay for Speedy, our sporthatched tortoise, and he woke, fit as a fiddle, last spring. But I've been told that hay can be dangerous. Is this true — and if so, why?

Hay and damp straw may develop mould fungi of the *Aspergillus* group, which can cause respiratory infections in tortoises as well as in man, cattle and birds. Less "natural" materials, such as shredded paper, polystyrene granules or wood wool, are much safer. A couple of ceiling tiles beneath Speedy's box will stop the cold striking from below and you should try to keep his winter quarters a few degrees above freezing but below 9C.

JAMES ALLCOCK

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A farmer is a boy's best friend

LIFE AND SOUL



JANE SHILLING

Probably better off without him in the long run, having apparently decided once and for all that nothing I can offer could possibly live up to the allure of his leaky septic tank, I went off in a sulk to Wiltshire, to visit Charles-who-farms. There is nothing Charles likes better than a sad girl, and he was immediately able to shed valuable light on the reasons for my tragic history of romantic reverses. "It's yer cooking," he said. "It's horrible. Full of garlic and what are those awful little black things? Olives. Fittegh. Disgusting. Have some more cabbage." So we ate up our cabbage (delicious) and went off for a stroll with the dogs in the late autumn sunshine, across his fields of maize and Jerusalem artichokes and newly planted rape. The whole scene was too ludicrously pretty for words — the brilliant blue sky, the hedges full of sloes and blackberries and rosehips and Old Man's beard, the black figures of the dogs, galloping ahead of us, working the spinnies and putting up pheasants and pertridges, to half-hearted roars of disapproval from Charles.

"Aren't they beautiful," he said dreamily, as the affronted birds strutted away

across the furrows. "And the Tuesday after next — Pow! Pow! Pow!"

"Pow! Pow!" echoed Alexander, who adores Charles — and you can just see why. For a start, he has a collection of farm machinery to die for — disc harrows and balers and combines and tractors, on which Alexander is allowed to ride for hours at a stretch (the notion that one could ever have had enough of fiddling with the controls of a John Deere being as alien to Charles as it is to my son). Also, he has a workshop full of vicious bandaws that could cut a little boy right down the middle in less time than it takes to say ouch. These we gaze at for more hours, with frissons of pleasurable horror, until I start whining to be taken home.

Then there are Charles's pockets, full of the most amazing treasures: cartridges and nails and, on this occasion, a Roman coin, millions and millions of years old, from the days before Thomas the Tank Engine roamed the earth — the pocket

money of some little Roman boy who had dropped it in Charles's field on his way to the toy shop to buy a chariot.

But actually, I suspect that the thing Alexander likes best of all about Charles is his short way with me. Gosh, it's getting awfully chilly, I say, in my usual bossy fashion. Perhaps we'd better go in now. That's enough playing on the combine, darling: I expect Charles has got other things to do. Sit down. No of course you can't have any pudding, you haven't eaten up your firsts. No more sweeties, Alexander. I mean it.

"Mum," says Charles, paying no more attention to me than if I were a

gnat, buzzing in his ear. "Let's walk round to the other duckpond and see if we can find some news, shall we? What do you think happens if you press this button? What sort of pudding would you like? Ice cream and toffee sauce, perhaps? Never mind about those carrots. Nasty things. Never eat them meself. Ah, I

seem to have found some more chocolate buttons in this pocket..." It is a wonderfully effective method of dealing with me, and Alexander seems to have adopted it as his very own.

I have been thinking for quite some time that my disciplinary techniques were due for a spot of reviewing. Up until

now they have been loosely based on a brief encounter I once witnessed on the telly between Lord Hailsham and his Jack Russell. "I am," said the rubicund peer to his beady-eyed, sceptical little dog, "bigger and stronger and cleverer than you".

This worked very well all the time I was bigger and stronger and cleverer than my offspring. But lately I have noticed the balance of power beginning to shift. He is a slender child, but very solid, and perfectly capable of bringing me down with a low tackle, also, he has quite suddenly become extremely argumentative and makes little attempt to conceal the fact that he thinks I am a half-wit.

We had a little difference of opinion on our return home from Charles's. Bedtime, I said, as we got out of the car. It is late. Not yet, said the child, he had urgent business to attend to. So attend to it in the

morning, I said, grasping him by the collar and grappling him, with considerable difficulty, up the stairs and into his pyjamas. Then I turned the light off, shut the door, and went back downstairs, securing the stairgate behind me. As I reached the bottom step, I heard the click of him turning the light back on again.

I poured myself a glass of something, and was just sitting down for a minute before tackling the next bit of the Great Rolling List (clean shoes, iron school trousers, remember to put homework in bag) when the drawing-room door half-opened, with a ghastly creak (this kind of horror-movie sound effect is a speciality of the fittings in our house).

"Who is it?" I quavered. "It's us," said Alexander, trotting in, grasping his disgusting old panda by the leg and looking every inch the adorable innocent, with his tousled gold curls and his little winecote pyjamas with the soldiers printed all over them.

Dear God, I said. But how did you get out? I closed the stairgate most particularly.

"I know," said my little lamb. "But I shot it off, the way Charles showed me. Pow! Pow! Pow!"

Grannies left out in the cold

A new organisation has been set up to help people cut off from their grandchildren by family squabbles

PAT O'DELL, who has many parents' idea of the perfect grandmother. When her daughter Nikki, a single mother, returned to work after the birth of her son Timmy, Pat looked after him during the week. Timmy also spent many weekends with Pat and her husband, and their relationship blossomed. "We were really close," she says.

But after two years, relations with her daughter began to sour. Nikki met a man — someone her mother did not approve of — and made other arrangements for Timmy's care. Then they moved away and Nikki rang and told Pat she would never see her grandson again.

"The way she said it I believed her," Pat says. "But I hoped that after a couple of years she would come round." Pat and her husband then raised more than £4,000 to re-establish contact with Timmy through the courts.

Eventually, Nikki agreed outside the courtroom to a fortnightly meeting at a family centre but, just before the first visit, changed her mind. Five years later, Pat does not even know where her daughter and grandson are living.

She describes her separation from Timmy as a bereavement without end. "When a child dies you move on; that child always has a place in your heart, but you know they have gone. But I know Timmy's out there all the time. Although I haven't seen him since he was two, every day I feel his arms around me, see his smile, remember his touch. Some days it's just unbearable."

Her experience prompted Pat to set up the Grandparents Support Organisation (GSO), a Southampton-based charity offering mediation and legal advice to grandparents who have lost touch with their grandchildren.

GSO deals with more than 500 cases a year. Many grandparents are denied access by a daughter-in-law following a separation, others are estranged from their own children or lose contact when the children are taken into care.

Of those grandparents who seek access through the courts, about 70 per cent are successful, though some spend as much as £12,000 in the process. Unlike parents, grandparents must initially seek leave from the court to make an application, says Hugh Travers, a London barrister. If leave is granted, as it usually is, grandparents can then apply for access. The courts

consider the grandparent's relationship with the child, whether there is acrimony between the two parties, and then decide whether re-establishing contact is in the child's best interests.

Judges are generally sympathetic, Mr Travers says. But gaining a contact order is one thing, and getting parents to co-operate is another.

After the birth of her second grandson, the atmosphere between Eileen, her only son Adam and his girlfriend Anna deteriorated. One day when Eileen went to drop off the children's Christmas presents, she found they'd moved.

After months with no contact, Eileen became so depressed that her second husband wrote pleading with Anna to get in touch. "She phoned and said we would never see the boys again," Eileen says.

Eileen started legal proceedings, and was allowed access to the children for four hours a month, although she could see her new grandson for only half an hour. "I wasn't allowed to give them toys or sweets, or even kiss them. But at least I was seeing them," she says. But not for long.

That Christmas, Eileen and her son had an argument; he refused to let her give the children presents, then wrote saying they didn't love her and didn't want to see her again.

EILEEN has not met her grandsons now for nearly two years. She has never seen her granddaughter, now one, despite three requests for a photograph. "I can't describe the hurt, the horrible feeling of having all this love and no one to direct it to," she says.

But she refuses to give up. Twice a month she writes with pocket money, and regularly sends birthday presents, Easter eggs, gifts for the summer holidays. "It's a little bit of contact," she says. "I want them to know that their nanny loves them."

Eileen has gone back to court, but is not hopeful of the outcome. "At the end of the day, the court's priority is the children's welfare, and apparently they're saying they don't want to see me. But I'll always go on hoping and trying, because I love them, and I don't know what I've done to justify such a terrible punishment."

EMMA HAUGHTON
Some names have been changed in order not to jeopardise efforts to re-establish contact.
Grandparents Support Organisation, 01703 632367.

PETER NICHOLLS



Pat O'Dell has not seen her grandson, Timmy, for five years



Reunited after 45 years, Jonathan Mirsky and guardian Ernst. Mirsky (below, with his father) had tried for decades to find Ernst through phone books

Cast the Net to catch a friend

After fruitless years of searching for an old family friend, Jonathan Mirsky turned to his PC and found him via the Internet

Horray for Yahoo! More particularly, hooray for Yahoo People Search. You may think that the World Wide Web is for porn-seekers and scrutineers of bulletin boards specialising in racing pigeons. But if, like me, you had been searching for someone for almost 50 years and found them in five seconds via Yahoo, spoke to them, and then met them, Yahoo becomes a friend for life.

In 1935, when I was two, my parents went to China, where my father was to be a visiting professor at the Peking Union Medical College. They took my seven-year-old sister, but left me in California with Marie, a 16-year-old German girl who my father taught to read and write, and Ernst, a 25-year-old cabinet-maker, who had been born in Germany but came to America as a small child.

When my parents returned months later I didn't recognise them, spoke only German, and soon developed the stammer which paralysed me into my teens. We all returned to New York, with Marie, who got married in about 1939, and Ernst, who set up a cabinet-making shop down the street and remained a near-father to my sister and me until he got married in 1951 and moved out of our lives. Over the years, whenever my sister or I went to another city, we looked in the telephone book for Ernst and would report to the other that, yet again, we hadn't found him. Eventually, when we realised he must be a very old man and probably dead, we gave up the search and memories of Ernst faded. There were no photographs.

Enter Yahoo. Yahoo is a "search engine" on the Web, a tool for finding your way around this gigantic network. Exploring it soon after it was installed last spring, I discovered People Search. I figured why not: what the hell... I typed in Ernst's entire name and guessed California. Zap! There he was, in a small

Californian town, with address and phone number (Yahoo must contain every telephone number in the United States).

It was 2am in California, but after 45 years who could wait? I rang. A voice. "Hello. Is that Ernst who used to be a friend of the Mirskys?" "Yes," I said. "Hello. I'm Jonathan." "Well, Jonathan, I certainly wasn't expecting to hear from you. Where are you?" "Hong Kong." "Really... then this must be a long-distance call."

"Well, yes Ernst, I found you in my computer." "Ah, computers. I hear they're wonderful things. Well, I just got a new passport, I think I'll come there next week." "Ernst, next week we're going to be handed over to China, and I'm pretty busy. How about in November, for my 65th birthday?" "That's good, I'll come then: 65, well well, I'm 89. See you soon." And so on.

It was now 3am in New York. But after 45 years... I rang my sister. "Gruut," "Reba, it's me. Amazing news. If you could talk to anyone in the world right now, who would you call?" "Ernst, of course." "Here's his number. He's waiting to hear from you." She called him and, like me, learnt that Ernst — always a matter-of-fact sort of man — had eaten oatmeal for breakfast that day, had a haircut, and a tuna-salad sandwich for lunch.

One day his daughter called to say he had fallen over, broken his hip and was in hospital. Soon she told me he had pneumonia and perhaps had had a stroke. Hospitals often kill the old. I flew to California. Ernst had insisted on meeting me in his daughter's house, and there he was, asleep. I gazed down on him, lying on his side in all his clothes, including



They trusted me. There was always a place for me at supper. And we took all our summer holidays together.

his shoes, and with an enormous white walrus moustache instead of the neat little Errol Flynn number I dimly recalled.

When he woke up we spent two days talking. He had photographs of the Mirsky family starting in 1935.

How had this young cabinet-maker from California become such a close friend of my biochemist father

and harpsichordist mother that they entrusted me to him, not only while they were in Peking but as a second father for the next ten years?

By the time he was 16, Ernst was a union-qualified carpenter: soon he was building sets in Hollywood for Laurel and Hardy, the laugh-hits of the late-1920s. "We built entire houses of balsa wood, which collapsed on the actors in earthquakes that we made happen on specially constructed vibrating platforms. We made locomotives which crashed into other locomotives."

Then something — unexplained — "really terrible" happened to Ernst. "I left home and became a hobo, riding the rails for two years all over the West. I learnt where to hop off trains before the railway police caught you, which towns had a friendly family, who would give a hobo a handout of pie or chicken and maybe a dollar."

After two years on the rails Ernst came to New York with three dollars in his pocket. "The first day I passed a place where they were setting up a Jewish charity bazaar and there was a Mrs Solomon, who gave me a job building cabinets and tables — and introduced me to your aunt Bashka the sculptress, who needed some shelves. That's how I met your mother."

My parents asked Ernst to build them some furniture and introduced him to friends and relations who needed similar work. "In those days rich people had expensive French furniture they wanted copied. I'd knock it apart, build a replica, cast and reproduce the hardware. I'd write 'original' on the bottom of the real one."

And Ernst entered my family. They trusted me. It began with my

work and my attitude towards it. If there is something people always wanted, not just a thing but a way of making it, and you give that, they never forget it. So soon I had my shop down the street from your parents' apartment. But there was always a place for me at supper. And we took all our summer holidays together."

Ernst remembered me, age four, in the ocean off Cape Breton Island. "I watched you in those waves but I could never have saved you — I couldn't swim."

In Ernst's faded photographs of him and my family he is always more formally dressed than anyone else, except in holiday scenes. I remember sitting in his shop, smelling the bubbling glue made of horses' hoofs and watching him turn chair-legs on his lathe. I felt safe. My father was a violent man, although soft-spoken with outsiders.

I asked Ernst if he remembered my summer. He hesitated: it was his only negative observation of our time together. "I remember. It was your father. I'd say he was crude."

Crude! Relief rolled over me. Over the decades my sister and I grew tired of being told about our gentle father. Now a third person remembered. And better still: "You know Jonathan, you look like your father. But you're not like him."

Ernst had a lot to say about hatred. "It poisons everything. When I was working in Hollywood, like all carpenters I had made my own tools. And we branded them with our own marks. The other fellows liked my tools. Sometimes one of them would steal one. I'd go over and say 'That's my tool'. They'd pretend to be surprised and try to give it back. I'd say, 'No keep it'."

That fellow would use my tool all his life and know it was mine and that he'd stolen it. He'd feel really ashamed. But there was no hatred."

'The advancing thud of horse's hoofs woke the slumbering piglet. It was hard to tell who was more frightened'

What follows is a tale which, although sad, might give some encouragement to anyone who thinks their working days are done and life will now be no more than a slow decline towards the inevitable scrap heap. While the song says "only the good die young", it seems that when it comes to carthorses the good ones sometimes go on forever.

One of our three Suffolk Punches, Blue, died last week at 12 years old. It was a premature death for a carthorse, but these things are not entirely unexpected. Despite their Herculean appearance, the inner workings of a big horse are a delicate mechanism consisting seemingly of miles of pipework, any length of which is predisposed to tangle. When their guts kink like an uncooperative garden hosepipe, internal functions come to a grinding and painful halt. Once knotted the gut is rarely undone, and the horse inevitably dies. Many good horses are lost this way.

It was shame it had to be Blue that went. He was at the very peak of his working life and schooled to perfection as

a working carthorse. There was no job at which he would flinch, be it ploughing, harrowing or dragging logs. He was one of the best: gentle, skilful, obedient and kind. In fact, the only time I remember him ever making a mistake was when dragging a ridging plough between rows of leafy potatoes in order to throw more earth over the growing tubers: this prevents them catching the sun and turning green. Unbeknown to either me or Blue, a two-month-old black piglet had escaped from the neighbouring pig-run by wriggling under the electric fence till it was free. It then headed for the field of potatoes — heaven for a pig. Here, it dug its juvenile snout into the field to unearth the succulent spuds, and gorged itself. Sated, it curled up between the rows and fell fast asleep, snoring.

Meanwhile, Blue and I were approaching. Like all good carthorses he knew that he must plod between the ridges,

and not on them so as not to damage the crop. It was hardly taxing work and took little concentration, and so both he and I ambled across the field, our minds blank, our feet on auto-pilot. It was at this moment that the advancing thud of the horse's feet woke the slumbering piglet. Stirred by what must have seemed like an approaching earthquake, the piglet snapped awake and raised its head above the green foliage. It is difficult to know who was the more frightened: the piglet who feared it was about to be trampled, or the poor carthorse who had been wandering

DOWN TO EARTH



PAUL HEINEY

All calming, soothing and halting words failed to impress him, and it was only when we arrived back at his stable door that he halted, panting and trembling like a child that had seen a ghost. It was fortunate that the field gate was open

or I suspect he might have tried to jump it. With the plough behind him. That apart, he never made another mistake.

I always felt that he was owed a peaceful life, having had a turbulent start in the world. Some days before he was due to be born, his mother, very heavy in foal, fell into a deep ditch and could not be extracted until they called the fire brigade. So grateful was the mare's owner that she promised to name the offspring after them. That was how he came to be called Blue — they were the Blue Watch. Now he has been taken from us, suddenly, out of the blue. We miss him.

But life must go on, and a field has to be ploughed. He would not have wanted us to use a tractor. It is a job for two horses and our youngster, Taffy, could not be asked to do it alone. So, who do you think I found peering over the hedge

as if to say "can I help"? No less than dear old Star. Twenty-two years old, stiff and creaky, shoes removed now he no longer works. I wondered if the job might not be too much for him. It seemed like not too much for him. It seemed like dragging grandad from his bath chair and telling him to dig the garden.

But there was a twinkle in his eye when I brought him off the meadow, which suggested he was ready and willing to take on the task. Once in the stable, he dutifully bent his head to take the collar and made for the field with the sort of spring in his step you might expect from a colt.

Without any prompting he was back in the furrow, treading carefully along it, keeping up a brisk pace which his partner, nearly 20 years younger, was having difficulty matching. And while young Taffy started to raise a sheen of sweat across his chest, old Star remained as cool and collected as if he had been training for this day for months.

Which only goes to show that there is many a good time played on an old fiddle. A pity that, this week, it had to be such a sad one.

Readers' letters are welcome on countryside matters, of all kinds. Address them to: Paul Heiney, Weekend, The Times, 1 Pennington Street, London E1 9XN. They are published on the first Saturday of the month.

Competition is cut-throat among the growers of record-breaking vegetables, says Anjana Ahuja

Pump up the pumpkin

Secrecy, subterfuge and sabotage. Little comes close to the shadowy world of growing giant fruit and vegetables. A husband and wife had their outside onions stolen the night before a big show. An American anthropologist was so fascinated by the passions shown by leek growers that she shadowed them. Dave Smith incurred the wrath of the Gateshead council for building a huge greenhouse in which to grow his exhibits. Neil Armstrong of Northumberland paid a friend £50 to sleep on his allotment to guard his prizewinning leeks — headlines later declared that Mr Armstrong had made "a giant leek for mankind".

Even after the fruit and veg show contests, entries are never left unattended. There is a lot of money to be made from the sale of seeds of giant specimens — there is even an organisation called the Worldwide Giant Seed Club — and as a result there have been several cases of exhibits disappearing.

Growers are often more interested in competing than in a particular vegetable or fruit. According to the *Guinness Book of Records*, Bernard Lavery, a grower from South Wales who has now moved to the United Arab Emirates, holds seven world records — for cabbage, carrot, longest corn cobb, courgette, marrow, parsnip and watermelon. And of the 32 listed records, 14 are held by people in Britain.

For this dedicated band, the premier event is the UK Giant Fruit and Vegetable Championships, held every autumn at the Baytree Nursery, Spalding, Lincolnshire, and which attracts 100 competitors. "The competition is intense," says Dave Brennan, one of the organisers. "A lot of the plants are grown at secret locations to avoid the threat of sabotage."

Do people really go around taking potshots at rivals' marrows? "I don't personally know of a case, but some competitors reckon it's a real concern," Mr Brennan says. The entrants, he adds, never reveal their gardening secrets, because of the money involved. "Each first-prize vegetable wins £250, with second and third prizes of £75 and £25. Then we have a final round, where the person who has done the best across all categories picks up £1,500. I reckon that this year's winner, Ken Dade, walked off with more than £3,000."

Jimmy Reid, a 75-year-old former demolition contractor, of Gilling West, near Richmond, North Yorkshire, disagrees that money is an incentive. His harvest this year included a 2½lb tomato, a 14½lb cucumber and a 30lb watermelon.



Allan Bagnell, with an outside prize leek at the Spalding show

He had to remove the doors of his greenhouse to extricate his prize pumpkin, weighing 678lb.

"The prize money's grand, but you're never going to grow fat on it," Mr Reid says. "It costs me at least £50 to hire a van or lorry to get the produce to the shows."

Trying to glean the secrets of the big veg is often fruitless. But good fertiliser and plain water is a favourite, and some gardeners claim that a pint of beer works wonders.

A few even suggest that chatting to the plants promotes growth. Others are more down-to-earth. "You have to do a pH test on your soil and find a fertiliser to match," Mr Reid says. "All that other stuff, like feeding them beer, is a load of rubbish."

In her book, *Pumpkins and Squash*, Caroline Boisset sets out a complex four-point plan for any aspiring pumpkin champion. The first step is to dig an enormous pit and fill it with well-rotted farm manure and soil.

Step two involves planting ahead of the last frost, then "planting out" when two leaves appear.

A baffling array of fertilisers is then employed in a very specific order, to pump up the buds.

Generous watering and high-phosphate fertiliser follows, and on cool summer nights, pumpkins should be covered.

Despite her advice, Ms Boisset is not enthusiastic about growing giant vegetables.

"I think they give vegetables a bad name. I put people off growing pumpkins, because they feel they can't grow the large ones. Even if they do, people don't tend to eat them. Smaller varieties are far



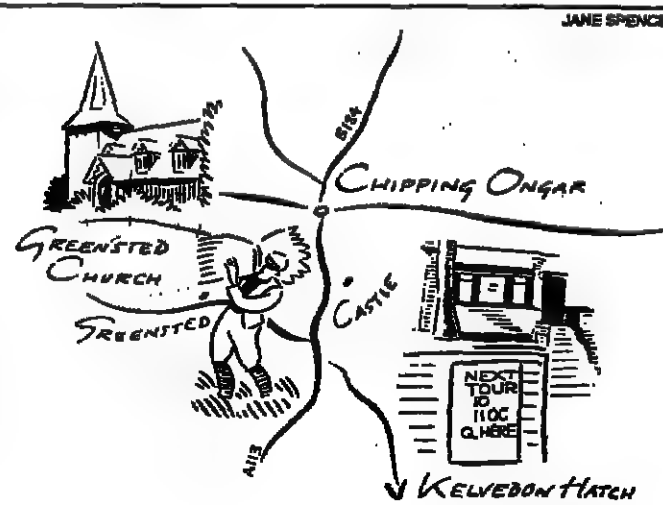
Jimmy Reid, 75, of Gilling West, Richmond, Yorkshire, had to remove the doors of his greenhouse to extricate his prize 678lb pumpkin

superior." But they don't win prizes. Two years ago Mr Reid won a holiday to America at an annual competition in Broughton, near Southampton, but his fear of flying meant the prize was passed to the runner-up.

Neither his prizewinning pumpkin, nor his normal-sized leeks and onions, are destined for the dinner table. "I never eat them, and my wife, Ivy, is sick at the sight of them," Mr Reid says. "I usually give them away or put them on the compost heap — after I've taken the seeds out."

Why, then, does he grow them? "To pass the time," he says. "You can't just sit around the house and vegetate."

● Pumpkins and Squash, by Caroline Boisset, is published by Mitchell-Beazley, £14.99.



ON THE SPOT: GREENSTED CHURCH

Rural recommendations

The place: the churchyard of Greensted Church, Chipping Ongar, Essex, with its majestic sycamores, spruces and yews.

The view: the ancient wooden church is clearly divided, in three: the white tower, timbered Saxon nave and brick chancel.

Appeal: unspoilt and friendly with lots of atmosphere. Historical interest: people have worshipped here continuously for 1,300 years. There is a grave thought to be that of a 12th-century crusader, and in 1834 the Tolpuddle Martyrs were given temporary shelter nearby.

Time to visit: any bright, autumn day. How to get there: from the A113 follow signs to Greensted Church. OS ref: 539/030 on sheet 167.

Also nearby: Chipping Ongar and its Motte and Bailey castle built in 1155. The secret nuclear bunker at Kelvedon Hatch is three miles south.

DEBORAH KING

BRITAIN has a magnificent new breeding bird. It is the little egret, an elegant white heron with long plumes on its back in the summer — the zigzags that milliners once used to trim hats.

These fine creatures have been visiting us in greater and greater numbers for some years now, probably dispersing from their colonies in Brittany and western France. The first three nests were recorded in summer 1996, one in Brownsea Island in Poole Harbour, Dorset, the others further west, but these were kept a treasured secret.

This summer, a colony of five pairs bred on Brownsea, and one pair elsewhere — and the news broke the week.

Kevin Cook is the warden at the Brownsea Island nature reserve, which is leased by the Dorset Wildlife Trust from the National Trust. He told me how, in 1996, they

That's no turkey — it's an egret

FEATHER REPORT

heard the egret's strange courting calls, like gobbling turkeys, from a dense area of trees. They guessed a pair might be trying to breed, but it was some weeks before his assistant, Giles Strother, saw one with a sick in its beak, and so became the first person to observe a nesting little egret in this country. Four chicks were eventually hatched in the bulky tree nest, and three of them fledged successfully.

This year, there were not only the five nesting pairs, but others coming to roost in the trees at dusk, with up to 20 birds present on some summer nights. The breeding birds could be seen courting



Egrets usually feed on the shrimps in brackish waters

in the treetops, flying round each other, or dancing up and down on the branches with their plumes waving. The Brownsea birds produced 12 young between them. They feed in the brackish waters at

the edge of the harbour, and behave quite differently from our grey herons. The latter stand very still, or step cautiously forward, before suddenly plunging their head downwards and spearing an

unsuspecting fish. They generally hunt alone. The egrets more often feed in small teams, and are more energetic. As they step forward they stir up the mud and disturb the shrimps, then chase them through the water, in the style of greenshanks rather than herons.

WITH LUCK, the Brownsea colony will grow next summer, and other colonies could well be founded in other parts of southwest England. Perhaps they will even become common birds in Britain.

In Italy (where many tourists have watched them in the Venice lagoon) there are some colonies with more than 1,000 noisy, squabbling pairs nesting in them. Global warming

may be responsible for the spread of this mainly Mediterranean species in northern Europe, and their dramatic arrival here.

There are plenty around at present, mostly in estuaries and other quiet waters in southern England. A good place to see a flock this weekend will be the Exe estuary in Devon. Apart from their gleaming white plumage, they have a sharp black bill, long black legs and (when they lift them out of the water) yellowish feet. They are quite unmistakable, and they are a thrilling sight.

DERWENT MAY

● What's about Birds? — watch for bramblings among flocks of finches. Twitchees — Blyth's red warbler at Flamborough Head, East Yorkshire; pied wheatear also in East Yorkshire; Hume's warbler at Holme, Norfolk. Details from Birdline, 0800 700222. Costs cost 50p a minute.

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Will things have changed by the time I turn the page.

Clanger that could muffle celebrations

A £6 million millennium project to restore church bells in at least 100 communities in Britain could be in jeopardy because of bureaucracy. One of only two surviving foundries in the country, the Whitechapel Bell Foundry, which began casting bells in 1570 and is a survivor of the Fire of London, has cast almost nothing for the "Ringing in the Millennium" celebrations, because it takes so long for everyone to go through all the hoops required by the Millennium Commission before they can receive funding.

Alan Hughes, the firm's managing director, believes it will be a race against time to have the bells up and ringing for January 1, 2000 even when the orders are processed. He is also concerned that the current shortage of work will affect his business.

"Next week seven or eight bells are due to be made," he says, "but the following week the number is down to one or two. We have provisional orders for 40 to 60 bells," he adds, "but we can't do anything until individual projects have been given the go-ahead. If we've still got no confirmations by December, half of my workforce of 25 will be doing nothing. The situation is threatening our very existence."

Bell work cannot be done hastily. Mr Hughes says that an additional bell ordered today would not be in place in the church tower until next Easter, taking into account the designs, planning permission and equipment.

Ross Nimmo, general manager of bell-ropes makers John Pritchard Ropes in Loughborough, Leicestershire, says: "The project will be a wonderful boost to the industry and a great way of renewing interest in bell-ringing. So far, though, there have been plenty of faxes and plenty of quotations but not a lot of hard-and-fast orders."

The idea for Ringing in the Millennium originated in Leicestershire, at St Remigius in Long Clawson, near Melton Mowbray. The church wanted two lighter bells to add to its ring of six, but Dr Lin Foxhall Forbes, a bell-ringer at St Remigius, reasoned that the Millennium Commission would be unlikely to fund such a relatively small venture. So

the idea of an umbrella project — in which the voluntary Central Council of Church Bell-Ringers would ask for funding for about 100 individual projects — was conceived.

The application was made in December 1995, and seven months later the commission announced that the bid had been successful. The grant was £3 million, with the proviso that a further £3 million come from local fundraising activities and private donations.

By the end of 1996, 500 initial applications for funding had been received. Of these, 150 projects have made progress with arranging co-funding and 48 projects are up and running. The deadline for registered projects is January 31 1998, but no new applications can now be considered. Dr Foxhall Forbes, one of two co-ordinators of the project, says that approval of applications is proceeding

'At noon, thousands of church bells will be ringing throughout the land'

pace, and is confident of meeting the target of 100-plus projects. She explained that some of the church tower bells may not have been rung for a long time, while others need restoring. Most of the work will go to eight firms of bell-hangers and the two foundries that do casting and returning.

Grants range from £2,000 to more than £60,000 for a Somerset church where bell-ringers could be trained. St Remigius has received more than £9,000.

Meanwhile, the recruitment drive to enlist 5,000 new bell-ringers to "Ring in 2000" continues. The Ringing World, a weekly journal for church bell-ringers, will publish a monthly list of new recruits with updates on their progress. The first list will be published in The Ringing World on Friday.

Editor Tina Stocklin says: "Hopefully, when noon comes on January 1, 2000, thousands of church bells will sound throughout the land, reminding us that the millennium is a lot more than a big party."

CHRISTIAN DYMOND

For details on Ringing in the Millennium, contact Dr Lin Foxhall Forbes, 01454 422022. Tina Stocklin at The Ringing World: 01483 569535. Whitechapel Bell Foundry: 32/34 Whitechapel Road, London E1 1DY. John Pritchard Ropes: 01509 212400.



Alan Hughes of the Whitechapel Bell Foundry is anxiously awaiting orders for new work

Friday prayers

Ruth Gledhill enjoys a lunchtime Mass for City workers



AS WITH many workers I am instantly drawn to any event with the title "Thank God It's Friday". This particular invitation was to a lunchtime event. I was expecting a poppy, instead it turned out to be a traditionalist's dream.

The priest-in-charge, the Ven Gordon Reid, is unpaid in this job, which he does at weekends, lunchbreaks and in between being Vicar-General of the Church of England's Diocese of Gibraltar in Europe. St Michael Cornhill was one of the many City churches threatened with closure in the recent report of the Templeman commission but efforts are now being made to keep it alive.

The response to his first TGIF Mass indicated his faith might be justified. Among the crowd was Sir Michael Craig-Cooper, director of the National Bank of Kuwait and master of the Drapers' Company. The pews were in traditional style, with livery shields on the wooden hinged doors and Sir Michael took up prime position in the Drapers' pew. The service, with the bells, music, liturgy and the setting itself, would have been good on a Sunday morning in a cathedral.

For a City lunchtime church, it was exceptional. We made our "humble confession" to God upon our knees. We bewailed our sins and wickednesses which we most grievously had committed and the burden of which had become intolerable. We heard the comforting words: "Come unto me all that travail and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you."

AT YOUR SERVICE

A five-star guide

PRIEST: Ven Gordon Reid
SERMON: The importance of rest and recreation. ★★★★★
ARCHITECTURE: Wren, Hawksmoor and Scott ★★★★★
MUSIC: Cornhill Choir and organist James Hills. ★★★★★
AFTER-SERVICE CARE: Free lunch. ★★★★★

The TGIF Mass will be held on the first Friday of every month and a guest speaker — restricted to ten minutes — will be invited to preach. For this first service, Archdeacon Reid took to the pulpit and exempted himself from the ten-minute rule.

The concept of the Mass, he explained, came from his former posting as Anglican chaplain in Stockholm, where the American marines celebrated the end of each week with a thank-God-it's-Friday party.

"It is about looking forward to recreation, thanking God that you have a job, that there is something you can do for your fellow man, to serve your neighbour," he said. It was right that we should stop work at the end of each week, he added. "Even God himself stopped work and had a Sabbath day of rest."

He progressed through the prayer of consecration and communion, finishing just in time to free us for work that afternoon.

St Michael Cornhill, London EC4A 3UD (0171 496 8011)



Archdeacon Gordon Reid at St Michael's, Cornhill

The Sabbath: our day of freedom and family life

Someone offers you a holiday. It will, he says, be an experience of total relaxation. No work, no phones, no faxes, no cars, no shopping, no television, no radio, just perfect quiet and peace. Best of all, there are no bills. The holiday is free.

There is such a break. It involves a journey, not from one place to another, but from one time zone to another.

It is called the Sabbath — the most original contribution of the Bible to civilisation, and still the most sublime.

Today is Shabbat Bereishit, the "Sabbath of Beginnings". For the past three weeks, Jews throughout the world have been celebrating the great sequence of festivals that mark the beginning of the Jewish year, Rosh Hashanah (New Year), Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement) and Sukkot (Tabernacles).

Now, life gets back to normal. And we mark this point in time by going back, in our regular biblical readings in the synagogue, to the beginning of Genesis, with its majestic poem on

the origins of the universe and its unexpected climax — "on the seventh day, God rested".

It is hard for us today to recapture the revolutionary strangeness of this idea. Every pagan religion has its festivals and holy days. But on none was work prohibited. They celebrated fertility, birth and death, the slow turn of the seasons, the mythic battles of the gods. None, though, celebrated rest.

The ancients believed that we imitate God by exercising power. What was novel about the Sabbath was the idea that we can imitate God by doing nothing, by ceasing, pausing, resting, reflecting and seeing that

Credo
JONATHAN SACKS



the world is good. For the Bible, this cannot be the whole truth, but it is part of it, and we live it one day in seven.

The Sabbath played a decisive role in Jewish history. In the book of Deuteronomy, it became a central defence of freedom. The Israelites had been slaves, and the defining

feature of slavery is less the physical burden of labour (in a free society there are still workaholics) than the fact that your time is not your own. You are subject to someone else's will.

The Sabbath broke that bondage. For one day in seven, no one could be employed. Everyone was master of his or her time. The Sabbath does not in itself create freedom, but it does generate a powerful appetite for it. No one who has experienced the Sabbath is content to remain a slave.

Today, the battle against slavery has been won in most parts of the world. But liberal democracies have other, subtler pressures of their own.

There are times when we work too hard, drive too fast, buy too much, driven by the thousand anxieties of everyday life, some real, others imagined.

For me, the Sabbath remains the still point at the centre of a turning world. It is the time when we come together as a family: eating, talking, singing and catching up with one another's company. We stop rushing to make a living, and instead simply live and celebrate life.

The Sabbath is a world we enter as equal citizens. The hierarchies of work and wealth are suspended. And as the rhythms of the day take over, I find myself once again recalled to the things that matter and that I sometimes forget in the rush of weekday time — love, listening, the company of family and friends, the glory of the created world.

It remains a supreme example of holy time, an oasis of rest in an otherwise restless age.

The writer is Chief Rabbi

Church Services tomorrow

Twenty-second Sunday after Trinity.
BANGOR CATHEDRAL: 8 HC; 9.45 HC; 10.30 HC. Te Deum in C (Stanford); 3.15 Ch E; 5 Goshen.
BELFAST CATHEDRAL: 10 M; 11 S. Eucharist; 11.15 S. Eucharist; 11.30 S. Eucharist; 11.45 S. Eucharist; 12.15 S. Eucharist; 12.30 S. Eucharist; 12.45 S. Eucharist; 1.15 S. Eucharist; 1.30 S. Eucharist; 1.45 S. Eucharist; 2.15 S. Eucharist; 2.30 S. Eucharist; 2.45 S. Eucharist; 3.15 S. Eucharist; 3.30 S. Eucharist; 3.45 S. Eucharist; 4.15 S. Eucharist; 4.30 S. Eucharist; 4.45 S. Eucharist; 5.15 S. Eucharist; 5.30 S. Eucharist; 5.45 S. Eucharist; 6.15 S. Eucharist; 6.30 S. Eucharist; 6.45 S. Eucharist; 7.15 S. Eucharist; 7.30 S. Eucharist; 7.45 S. Eucharist; 8.15 S. Eucharist; 8.30 S. Eucharist; 8.45 S. Eucharist; 9.15 S. Eucharist; 9.30 S. Eucharist; 9.45 S. Eucharist; 10.15 S. Eucharist; 10.30 S. Eucharist; 10.45 S. Eucharist; 11.15 S. Eucharist; 11.30 S. Eucharist; 11.45 S. Eucharist; 12.15 S. Eucharist; 12.30 S. Eucharist; 12.45 S. Eucharist; 1.15 S. Eucharist; 1.30 S. Eucharist; 1.45 S. Eucharist; 2.15 S. Eucharist; 2.30 S. Eucharist; 2.45 S. Eucharist; 3.15 S. Eucharist; 3.30 S. 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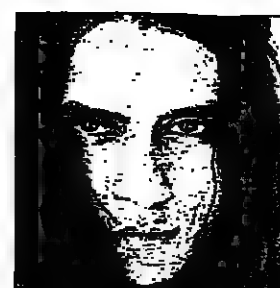
Cruising in style – but is it worth the price?

High seas - 22, 23

THE TIMES TRAVEL

How to enjoy This Life at New Year

UK · 27



Wedding bells in the Seychelles



Mary Gold tied the knot on an island in paradise

When I told my mother I was getting married, she let out a shriek, invoked the names of several saints and stamped her foot, all at the same time. She pointed out that my intended was divorced and "not even a Cadick" and then knocked her pipe out noisily on the grate before breaking into Irish – always a bad sign. I stopped my sherry and said: "Do I take it you won't be coming?"

We decided to go abroad. When I said I wanted to go somewhere I had never been before, Harry (my intended) said: "How about the kitchen?" I ignored that – and picked the Seychelles.

Couples tie the knot in a foreign country for a variety of reasons – escaping their relatives, the British weather, or people from a previous existence who might turn up and cause a scene. In our case it was all of these. It is also much cheaper to marry abroad. The average cost of a wedding in Britain is £9,534. Our ceremony in the Seychelles cost just a few hundred pounds.

The benefits are obvious. You do not need caterers, bridesmaids or speeches and, on a small island, the groom cannot run away – well, not easily. All you have to do is turn up at the appointed time. When we came back to England we had a church blessing. We invited 100 guests, hired a marquee and it poured with rain the night before. I had three hours' sleep and my stress levels went off the Richter scale.

But on Mahé, the principal island of the Seychelles, the sun shone and the only stress came from deciding where to eat lunch. For us, the attraction of these islands was the things that were missing – thumping music, hawkers, neon lights and Mick Jagger singing *I'm a Bleeding Heart*.

In fact, after a few hours you realise why a group of mercenaries, posing as a touring rugby team, tried to stage a takeover in 1981. When one of them hoisted his holdall at the airport, an AK47 fell out. This gave the Customs men a clue and it was all downhill from there.

Today, there is little crime on the Seychelles, a fact reflected in the headlines of Mahé's newspaper, *Regar* (motto: "Upholding your right to know"). The front page said: "More care for elderly" and "Car park closed for diplomat's funeral". The only real story seemed to be of a New Zealand pirate travelling on a stolen passport, who took someone's yacht and jumped into the sea in Mahé harbour when the game was up.

Pirates are among the privileged few to have visited these 40-odd islands stuck in the middle of the Indian Ocean – they have been inhabited for little more than 200 years –



For better or worse: Harry and Mary after their sunshine beach wedding ceremony at Fisherman's Cove on Mahé, in the Seychelles

and for most of their brief history they have been uninhabited. They are 1,000 miles from the nearest landfall and have only played host to tourists since the 1970s. Even in Port Victoria, the shabby but vibrant capital of Mahé, tourists look out of place, like sepias people who have wandered into a colour photograph.

Fisherman's Cove, where we spent five days before we were married (a legal requirement), was a picture. Little thatched bungalows draped in bougainvillea surrounded the main plantation-style house (also thatched), and the whole caboodle overlooked the Indian Ocean. Since a lovely lady called Janine was handling the

cake-music-paper-work shenanigans, there was little for us to do except lurk on the beach. Middle-aged men from the Home Counties with port-mottled faces waded thigh-deep in the warm water and then stood still, sighing deeply, as if to say: "Well, that's enough exercise for this year."

We spent the night before the wedding in the bar, where we met the dashing Norfolk businessman Peter Charlton and his lovely wife, Anne, a Lauren Bacall look-alike, both charming – and both ideal for our last flurrying session as single people – at least until Peter confessed his admiration for Margaret Thatcher.

The next day I went into the plantation house, where the ceremony was to take place, to find six people decorating the balcony with a great arbour of flowers. An elderly gardener said: "Madam, you cannot



Beach at Bird Island: "a little slice of heaven"

stay here. There is wedding later." So I took myself off for a stiff drink and to wait. Fidgeting for the hairdresser. I thought I might have half an hour before the 4pm ceremony to unwind, but the hairdresser did not depart until the bitter end, leaving about six

minutes for war-paint and getting dressed. Just as I was starting to cry, Janine appeared with a glass of champagne, turned the air conditioning to the "demented woman" setting and found the earring I had dropped on the floor.

Anyone who tells you the dress is not as important abroad is talking rubbish. It is far more important.

You can look very silly indeed standing on a beach in the Caribbean dressed as Little Bo Peep. The dress must be cool, but not look like a sundress. A company called Ronald Joyce does a good, reasonably priced

range especially for hot climates and I managed to stop parking long enough for Janine to stuff me into one. Then it was down to the plantation house on the arm of James, the best man borrowed from the hotel, smiling into the video cameras of complete

strangers, to where Harry was waiting. The ceremony was informal but dignified, mainly because the island's senior registrar spoke respectfully and slowly, although he need not have announced my age quite so loudly when I have been knocking a couple of years off ever since I was thirty-mumble-mumble.

We cut the cake, opened the champagne and then Peter said: "Is that it? If I'd known it was that simple I'd have fetched that little Danish gel off the beach." His wife smiled indulgently.

Janine had arranged for us to go out in a boat, so we hitched up my frock and hopped into a speedboat for an hour around the island. The crew of a tall ship moored in the bay sounded their foghorn and threw flowers. It really could not have been nicer.

The next day we took the half-hour flight to Bird Island, where a maximum of 40 guests share a little slice of heaven with three giant tortoises and the one and a half million sooty terns that come to nest here between May and October.

Guy Savy and his wife Marie-France bought Bird Island for £28,000 in 1967, built

SEYCHELLES FACT FILE

- Mary Gold travelled with Elegant Resorts (01244 897888). Her 15-night tailor-made package, including return flights from Gatwick on Air Seychelles, five nights' B&B at Fisherman's Cove, three nights' full board at Bird Island Lodge, seven nights' B&B at L'Archipel, and all transfers, costs from £2,655 per person. Departures year-round.
- The wedding package at Fisherman's Cove, including the services of a registrar, floral arrangements, bottle of champagne, one-tier wedding cake, bouquet, headdress and groom's boutonhole, costs from £395. Allow four working days to organise a wedding in the Seychelles.
- Air Seychelles (01293-596656) has two weekly services from Gatwick from £575-£775 return, depending on season and departure day.
- The Ronald Joyce dress, style no 1160, costs £199. Stockists nationwide on 0171-636 8989. Tiara by Jenny Wicks, 0161-434 6855.
- Wedding arrangements on Mahé were handled by Janine Camille of Travel Services Seychelles on behalf of Elegant Resorts. The TSS number on Mahé is 00 248 322414.
- It is important to plan something special after the ceremony and before dinner, otherwise you will inevitably be propping up the bar in your wedding clothes and looking foolish. A one-hour boat trip costs about £30. It is also worth booking musicians to enliven the proceedings. On Mahé an excellent guitarist costs £65. All can be booked through TSS. Most hotels will provide a room, free of charge, in which the groom can dress.
- The best restaurant for a celebration dinner on Mahé is La Bagatelle in Bel Air (224722). On Praslin we liked the balcony restaurant at L'Archipel (232242).
- Take with you pictures of the bouquet and hairstyle you want – English-speaking florists and hairdressers cannot be guaranteed.
- Be careful when buying the coco de mer nuts – some are carved wooden copies. Look for the Seychelles government stamp and be prepared to pay £120.
- Health tips: inoculations are not necessary but take insect repellent. Sand flies on Praslin are a menace. Take plastic sandals for the beach if you are a crab-phobe.
- Guidebooks: *Mauritius, Réunion and the Seychelles* (Lonely Planet, £8.95); *Spectrum guide to the Seychelles* (£12.99).
- Seychelles Tourist Office (0171-224 1670).



Not for Mary's photo album: coco de mer nuts



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The cruise ship that thinks it's a yacht

I was the evening Jimmy Lockheed, the *matre d'*, bumped into us on the staircase that I realised the *Sea Goddess* was no ordinary ship and this was no ordinary trip. "Are you all right?" he asked. "I was getting worried about you." They served dinner until 10 o'clock. It was 9.15pm and we hadn't shown up at our usual table, so Jimmy was about to knock on our cabin door to make sure all was well. It was one to add to my memoirs, or to the work-in-progress *Head Waiters I Have Known*.

The *Sea Goddess* is a small ship that calls itself a yacht. I'd call it magic. Since the Government is a bit worried about replacing *Britannia* it might think of leasing the *Sea Goddess*. I can't imagine Her Majesty would object — although it might make her cross when she looks around and thinks about what she's missed over the years.

For us, it was as though some wealthy potentate had invited us aboard his private craft, a kind of house party at sea.

Before we travelled, Cunard sent us a questionnaire. Among the questions was, "Would you like to let us have your favourite recipe?" We didn't, and I'm glad. The food on board was as tempting as the service, the ambience excellent. Unlike the bigger ships, the *Sea Goddess* has no theatre or cinema, so you are expected to linger long and comfortably over meals. Dinner is a two or three-hour candlelit experience in a good French restaurant. The *matre d'* always seems to be there to see that everybody is happy — when he is not running up and down the stairs looking for his customers. The wine flowed as fast as the waiters and neither was subject to extra charge (tips are included).

Because the ship is small compared with many cruise liners — there were 60 passengers on our

After a relaxing Aegean voyage, Michael Freedland puts a scoot on

FACT FILE

■ Michael Freedland travelled with Cunard (general inquiries 01703 634166, or call 0800 006500 quoting Ref SG81 for a brochure).

■ From May to September next year, Cunard offers seven-night cruises on the *Sea Goddess II* (which is identical to *Sea Goddess I*) on routes from Athens to Istanbul, and from Istanbul to Venice, from £4,170 per person in a twin room and from £6,260 in a suite. The price includes all food, drink and tips, but excludes flights — which Cunard can arrange — and port and handling charges of £150 per person. Prices based on two sharing a cabin.

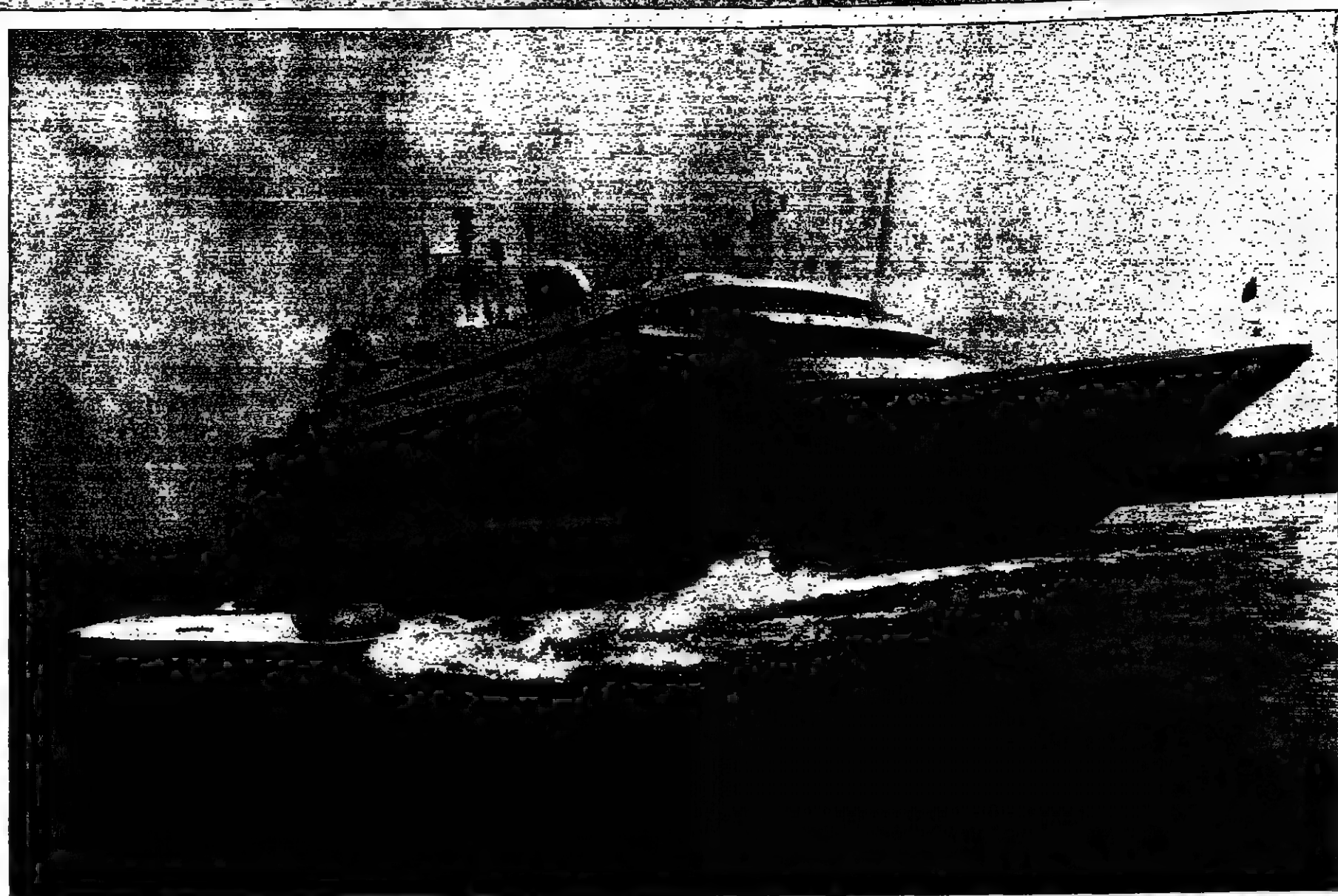
■ Most excursions are also included in the cost. However, there are additional tours to certain difficult-to-reach spots, which are always run simultaneously with other free trips. (On Skiathos, for instance, you could pay £85 to hire a Jeep).

■ Dress is formal on two evenings and informal (jackets and ties) on three. On the other two evenings, the requirement is "elegant casual" — in practice, men do not come down for dinner without a jacket and tie.

trip, and the maximum capacity is 116 — she can anchor at the coves and on the shores of islands which other ships can't reach.

The *Sea Goddess* began its slow voyage from Istanbul to the Greek Islands via the Dardanelles. The May weather, which had begun with rain, was glorious as we sailed

CRUISING: AEGEAN SEA



Her small size means the *Sea Goddess* can get close enough to shore for guests to go water-skiing and ride wet bikes, and she can dock in the centre of a city

past Gallipoli. If Churchill had taken a trip like this before engulfing the Australians and New Zealanders in one of the worst disasters of the First World War, he would have seen it was a hopeless operation. The beaches were totally exposed — and looked beautiful from the deck of the ship.

The first excursion came the next day. It was to the Greek island of Skiathos, a little place where the people think they ought to throw a party whenever they see a motor car — the coach taking us around the island had to be brought in specially for us from Athens. We found the old town, a few shops selling sunhats and sandals and roads paved with stones more than 1,000 years old. We climbed to the top of a mountain and saw a very old monastery, a testament to both the faith of the monks and their good taste in choosing a spot that surveyed such spectacular views of both countryside and sea.

Skiathos, the following day, was very different. It rained, and this was much more your idea of an upmarket resort town, upmarket shops and upmarket open-air restaurants that even offer upmarket cushions on their wickerwork chairs. The interesting part of Skiathos comes, as in most resort towns, behind the main street — quaint little roads with old buildings draped in vivid red flowers.

It was at Volos on the fifth day that the relationship between Greece and its Orthodox Church became most apparent. The Metaxa monasteries, near where Julius Caesar defeated Pompey, have an air of obvious sanctity about them and are, plainly, also a boon to the tourist industry. The guides will tell you again and again that they have the finest painting anywhere of the Last Supper and offer a chance to look at the skull of St Nicholas for good measure.

Thessaloniki (Salonica), home of

one of the greatest archaeological discoveries of all time, is a city I had always wanted to see. In the city's museum are the treasures of King Philip II of Macedonia, father of Alexander the Great. Gold urns, gold jewellery of a kind to make the gentlemen at Garrards salivate — including a couple of laurel wreaths — and precious stones.

All these treasures could have been newly made, or at least be part of someone's family heirloom collection. Alas not mine. There were also magnificent ivory shields, gold-inlaid swords, helmets and other armour, all of it taken from the king's tomb in one of the most outstanding finds of the century — a kind of Greek Tutankhamun.

The church of St Demetrius — he of the battle with the Gladiators — contains relics of the man who is patron saint of the city. It is built on the site of the Roman baths, where

he was imprisoned and then slain.

Modern Thessaloniki is a charming city, a pleasant sea shore, an avenue of shops, and a bustling market that appears to extend all over the city's back streets. But above all, it was here that the fascination of arriving by ship comes into its own. Step down the gangplank — you are required to register on a pegboard as you go ashore and move the pegs when you return — and you are already in the centre of the city, just as though you had arrived in Oxford Street by Tube. A weird sensation.

In a way, though, no more weird than my temptation to indulge in water-sports. Those who know me will agree that that is not my usual bent. But the day after Thessaloniki, the ship sailed along the Halkidiki peninsula. The rocks and islands were as idyllic as any I know, and when the ship docked only a matter of yards from one of them, it was as though we were

taking part in a movie travelogue.

The ship's captain, David Warren Owen, decided it was an occasion for a sailor's holiday. He whizzed around the ship in a dinghy and invited his passengers to go water-skiing. That was distinctly not my cup of tea, but in a blue sea that was like a polished mirror, the water scooters were something else.

You are strapped on to these with life jackets and crew members are on hand to effect any necessary rescues. They were not called upon.

That was something you couldn't do on bigger ship. It would never get that close to shore. Neither would the stewards waste in and out of the sea to serve drinks, as happens on some *Sea Goddess* cruises. This time, they contented themselves with climbing fully clothed into the swimming pool and offering barbecue snacks and delicacies from there. Why, I never really worked out.

'The crabs wore 'we were here first' expressions'

Continued from page 21
simple wooden lodges for their guests and planted fruit and vegetables to feed them. Today, the lodges have solar heating and four-poster beds and the restaurant is first-class.

On Bird Island, everyone behaves a bit like Catholics in Heaven — they pretend they are the only people there. Wander through the dense

mangrove and you may see other people, but they scuttle off into the undergrowth like perverts in the park.

So we snorkelled and snored for three days and were rather depressed when the time came to leave. I shall probably go back there to die.

Then it was off to Praslin (pronounced Pralin), the second biggest of the Seychelles at seven miles long and two

miles wide. If Mahé was quiet, Praslin was positively comatose. There was a disco but it was padlocked, and there was a casino but no one ever seemed to use it.

We stayed at L'Archipel, a cluster of beach houses among palm trees with views to the island of Curieuse. Our veranda was 30ft long and the room was spectacular — a muslin-draped bed on a platform with

a fan spinning overhead. It was straight out of *World of Interiors*.

When we started to feel guilty about lolling about, we walked into Bay St Anne up the road, a shabby little place with the air of an abandoned film set. The shops advertised an unpredictable assortment of oddities: "Mr Esperanza, purveyor of goods, liquor and chicken parts". Another shop sold pictures of Christ with Creole features, dresses so outdated they would soon be back in fashion and the sort of ladies' underwear that advertises itself through your clothes. Beautifully dressed children sat on their garden walls watching the world wag past and without exception, everyone we passed said "Bonjour".

In Bay St Anne we caught a bus to the Vallée de Mai, the 45-acre national park which is home to an outsize collection of botanical astonishments, including the bizarre coco de mer plant. This huge and heavy double nut is described coyly in the guidebook as "shaped like a woman's pelvis" and while extraordinary, it is not the kind of thing you really want to be seen holding in a photograph — and certainly not displayed in your wedding photo album.

Then it was back to the beach restaurant at L'Archipel for lunch.

The beaches in the Seychelles are about the best I have seen, but the little private one at L'Archipel was my favourite. Although small, it is only a few steps from your bungalow and strangely quiet, the guests even whispering to each other under the palm trees.

Under the Seychelles sound too idyllic, I do have one complaint. On Bird Island, the path between our lodge and the restaurant was littered with large crabs after dark. A French lady two doors up had to be taken to dinner in a wheelbarrow.

The crabs wore "we were here first" expressions and made no move to scuttle away. I screamed and hopped so much that Harry had to give me a piggyback. Unfortunately, I had fibbed about my weight as well as my age, and just as we were in among the enemy, Harry's knees buckled, he fell to the ground and I was catapulted over his head in among a thousand claws. I think it is grounds for divorce.



Taking the plunge: this couple married under water — the bride in white with a garter, the groom with a top hat

A WEDDING in a wadi is the latest variation available to a couple deciding to marry abroad, writes Steve Keenan. The travel company Weddings Abroad is to feature Dubai after requests from couples dreaming of an English *Patiënt*-style ceremony against a background of rippled dunes and the strains of *Midnight at the Oasis*.

The more exotic the location, the better, but the broadening range of destinations may also reflect a move away from mainstream wedding spots: Barbados, Kenya, Antigua and the Seychelles have all dropped in the list of Kuoni's Top 10 wedding destinations, while Sri Lanka, Thailand and Australia are on the up (see below).

Nick Cropper, director of Weddings Abroad, said: "I am unhappy with the Caribbean in general, particularly the Dominican Republic. Problems happen when com-

EXOTIC WEDDING BEDES

placency sets in. Things get overlooked at hotels doing four or five weddings a day and, when one problem occurs, it festers. Things that could have been nipped in the bud become a big dilemma."

Recent complaints include those from a Manchester couple who are suing travel company Unijet over blurred wedding pictures in Antigua. And Thomson, last month, had to move wedding clients to different hotels in the Dominican Republic because a planned hotel refurbishment had been delayed.

The potential for disaster is vast — and free T-shirts, breakfast in bed or sparkling wine will not appease couples when the photographer or hairdresser do not turn up. However, the appeal of marrying on a palm-fringed

beach has not abated, with estimates of up to 40,000 couples marrying abroad.

People are also spending more, with the average outlay in the past two years having increased by 50 per cent to £1,500 per person, says Mr Cropper. He cites one couple lashing out £500,000 to take a wedding party of 100 abroad.

Several tour operators now have separate wedding brochures, including Thomson, Air Tours, Cosmo and Kuoni. According to Colleen O'Brien, the wedding co-ordinator for Kuoni, about half its clients are second-timers at the altar. "They prefer a beach to a register office on a cold winter morning," she said.

More destinations are becoming available, such as Bali, which has now cut residency rules to 14 days instead of 28. The average

residency requirement at most destinations is five days. But certain countries have wedding restrictions. Canada and Switzerland are still hide-bound by bureaucracy, and most Muslim countries are off-limits.

Local rules apply wherever you are. Bali may have cut its residency rule, but refuses to cater for divorced Catholics.

Weddings Abroad, 0161-969 1122, Kuoni, 01906 74007.

THE TOP 10 WEDDING DESTINATIONS

(1996 position in brackets)	DESTINATIONS
1 (1)	St Lucia
2 (2)	Sri Lanka
3 (2)	Antigua
4 (3)	USA
5 (4)	Kenya
6 (5)	Antigua
7 (7)	Maldives
8 (6)	Thailand
9 (8)	Australia
10 (1)	Source: Kuoni

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CRUISING: BLACK SEA

Casting a shadow on the Viking Sun

Maria Harding asks whether Cunard's finest ship is all it's cracked up to be

The American woman accosted me as I was about to board the coach for a visit to the ballet, her lips set thin with disapproval.

"Excuse me, but I couldn't help overhearing you say at lunch you thought Odessa was a lovely city. I just can't believe you mean that. It's so bleak, so run down. They've spent nothing on doing it up..."

I pointed out that cash was not exactly thick on the ground in Ukraine in the wake of deunification, and defended Odessa as best I could on a few hours' acquaintance.

Surely the city's pastel-tinted 19th-century houses, the lovely tree-lined Pimorsky Boulevard overlooking its Potemkin Steps, and its Classical-style circular opera house had a certain grandeur, albeit faded?

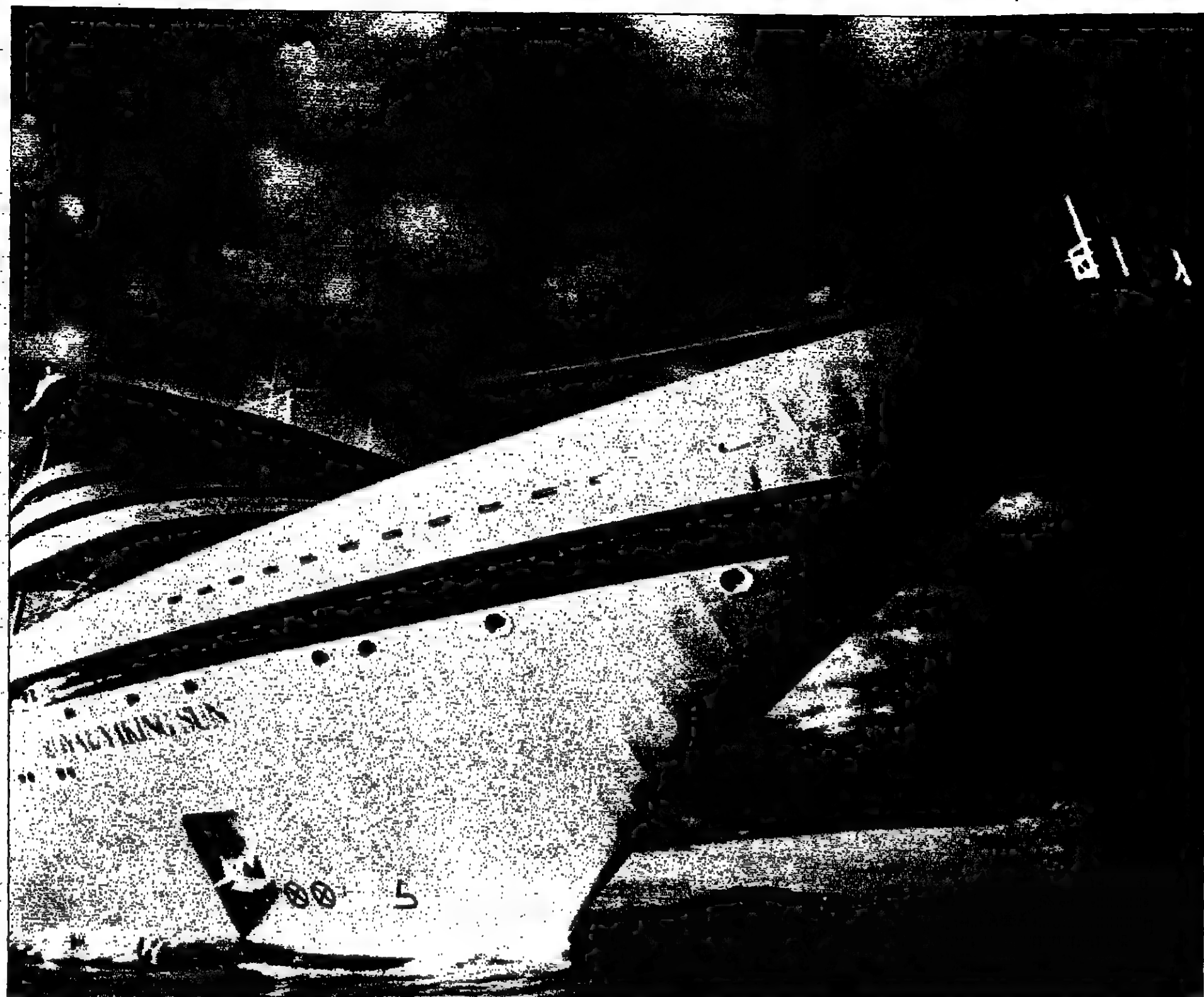
She remained resolutely unimpressed as we headed for that same opera house to watch the Odessa State Academic Opera and Ballet Theatre give a heart-rending performance of *Giselle*.

Sitting stolidly in the box next to mine, she made no attempt to applaud the virtuosity of the dancers and did not even wait for the first curtain call before hightailing it back to the coach.

Ah well, I thought, when you are travelling on a ship vaunted by its owners as the world's finest, perhaps life on board seems preferable to anything you are likely to encounter ashore.

And indeed, Cunard Line's *Royal Viking Sun*, on which we took our Black Sea cruise, is a ship with a noble lineage. Built in 1988 for Royal Viking Line, a Norwegian company famed for the quality of its service, the 37,845-ton vessel was designed to be the most luxurious medium-sized cruise ship in the world, providing the ultimate in comfort, service and sheer class to her 814 pampered passengers. The *Royal Viking Sun* fell into Cunard's hands in 1994 and subsequently spearheaded the line's drive to establish itself as a luxury-cruise operator. Since then, Cunard has been singing her praises long and loud, referring to her as "the world's highest rated cruise ship".

The line bases such assertions on the 1997 edition of the *Berlitz Guide to Cruising and Cruise Ships*, which gives



Cunard proudly refers to its *Royal Viking Sun* as "the world's highest-rated cruise ship" — but some passengers claim that standards have gone downhill

Royal Viking Sun — along with four other ships — a top rating of 136.5.

Judging by appearances — the elegance of *Royal Viking Sun*'s public rooms and her spacious outside decks — I could see why the *Berlitz* researchers had been impressed. But having sampled the standards of service on board, I could not help feeling that under her new management, *Royal Viking Sun* — rather like Odessa — is trading on past glories.

And I was not alone. A New York couple who had cruised on the ship in her heyday were vociferous in their disappro-

als. "*Royal Viking Sun* has definitely gone down, both in service and cleanliness," the wife said. "The sheets used to be changed every day. Now my cabin maid tells me it's every three days. It's just not good enough!"

An American lady of Scottish descent — drawn to our group by a kilt-wearing compatriot — was equally disappointed. "The ship has definitely changed — and not for the better. The service is nothing like as good as it used to be," she complained.

Don't get me wrong: *Royal Viking Sun* is a world away from what the tabloids might call "a floating Lubliner"; judged simply as a five-star cruise ship, she certainly passes muster.

Her outdoor decks are broad and well maintained, with a few nice touches like a croquet lawn (the only one afloat) and a small putting green. She also caters for workaholics with a business centre, for health fiends with a roomy gym and spa, and for golfers with a simulator which lets would-be Tiger Woods "play" some of the world's great courses by computer.

Her main dining room, resplendent in pale grey and mauve with huge windows, brass trimmings, snowy linen, fine china and crystal, is one of the prettiest I have seen. The food is good, too.

True, a couple of steaks were overcooked and the salads unimaginative, but, apart from the odd aberration, stan-

dards were high, the bread oven-fresh, the soups absolutely delicious and the puddings to kill for.

The ship's alternative dining room, the *Veneziana Restaurant*, at which passengers may eat only once a week, was even better: classic Italian food was served with panache in a chic setting — a real treat.

Another pocket of excellence was the *Stella Polaris Lounge*, a lovely semi-circular bar, with dramatic ocean views, a ship's wheel (popular for passenger snapshots), a harpist and the ship's best barman, a cheerful Frenchman.

And Tore Lura, the captain of the *Royal Viking Sun*, was a real charmer, who took time out on disembarkation day to bid each passenger farewell as they left the ship.

But some aspects of the ship bore comparison with other top-range vessels less sturdily. Cabins ranged from rather poky insides to 21 enormous, 606 sq ft penthouses and one, even bigger, Owner's Suite.

I stayed in a B-grade cabin with a broad balcony, television and video, a comfortable double bed, mini-bar (empty), a two-seater sofa and a walk-in closet.

The bathroom was quite small, with only a shower unit (some have baths, so check when booking) and, surprisingly, no hairdryer. Cosy towelling robes and slippers are provided in all cabins, but only penthouse and Owner's

Suite occupants qualify for free drinks.

Lesser mortals may order stocks for their mini-bars but only once they are aboard — a bore if, like me, you arrive hot and sticky after a delayed flight to find there is not even a bottle of mineral water to hand.

Room service was available around the clock, but was run on a rather strange system whereby you dial a number, hang up and wait for your stewardess to call back. This is fine if you only want a sandwich, but a hassle if you want to order from the restaurant menu, available during dining hours — as you then have to call for a menu, wait for the stewardess to deliver it, and call back (hang up, wait, etc) to place your order.

If you want wine with your lunch or dinner, there is more delay, as you have to sign a requisition form before they will deliver it.

Compare this with luxury-cruise operators Seabourn Cruises and Silversea Cruises — where passengers are greeted with a complimentary bottle of chilled champagne, room service is a simple phone call away, and staff give the impression that nothing is too much trouble — and you'll see why I am not overly impressed with the *RV Sun's* claim to be "the finest afloat".

The problem seems to be that there are too many rules and regulations; you get the impression that the ship is being run more for the benefit

of the crew than of the passengers.

For example, bars closed at bizarre and inconvenient times. On the night we boarded, we met in the Mid-night Sun Lounge for drinks at

7.30pm to be told the bar would close for cleaning at 8pm. As the witching hour arrived, we had staff vacuuming around our feet until we took the hint, gulped our drinks and left.

FACT FILE

■ Maria Harding travelled with Cunard (general inquiries 01703 634166, or call 0800 000500 quoting Ref RVSI for a free brochure). She joined the *Royal Viking Sun* for part of a 14-night cruise from Venice to Piraeus, calling at Yalta and Odessa in Ukraine and Canakkale in Turkey.

■ In August 1998, a 14-night Black Sea Odyssey cruise will cost from £3,930 for an inside cabin, £5,840 for a Category B1 cabin, and £10,280 for a penthouse.

The price includes economy scheduled flights to Venice and back from Athens, all food, on-board entertainment and tips, but excludes drinks, shore excursions and port and handling charges of £135 per person.

■ The ships which share *Royal Viking Sun's* top rating in this year's *Berlitz Guide to Cruising and Cruise Ships* are Hapag-Lloyd's 37,012-ton, 600-passenger *Europa*, the Cunard-owned 4,260-ton, 116-passenger sisterships *Sea Goddess I* and *Sea Goddess II*, and Seabourn Cruises' 9,975-ton, 212-passenger *Seabourn Legend*.

The Dining Experience, as they call it in the brochures, was also less relaxed than might be expected on this class of ship. In theory, you could go to dinner any time between 7.30 and 9pm, but we got a distinctly sulky reception when we pitched up one night at 8.30.

And at breakfast on our last morning, when several waiters were standing about empty-handed, I was told in the sternest tones by one that he was too busy to answer a simple question, and informed me curtly that I'd have to wait.

Relatively minor niggles, I know. But the problem with claiming to be the world's best — and setting fares to match those claims — is that people expect you to come up with the goods.

My verdict? If you take it as one of the 20 ships given five-star or five-star-plus status in this year's *Berlitz Guide*, *Royal Viking Sun* has a fair amount to recommend it.

But the finest ship afloat? As my American friend might say, get real.

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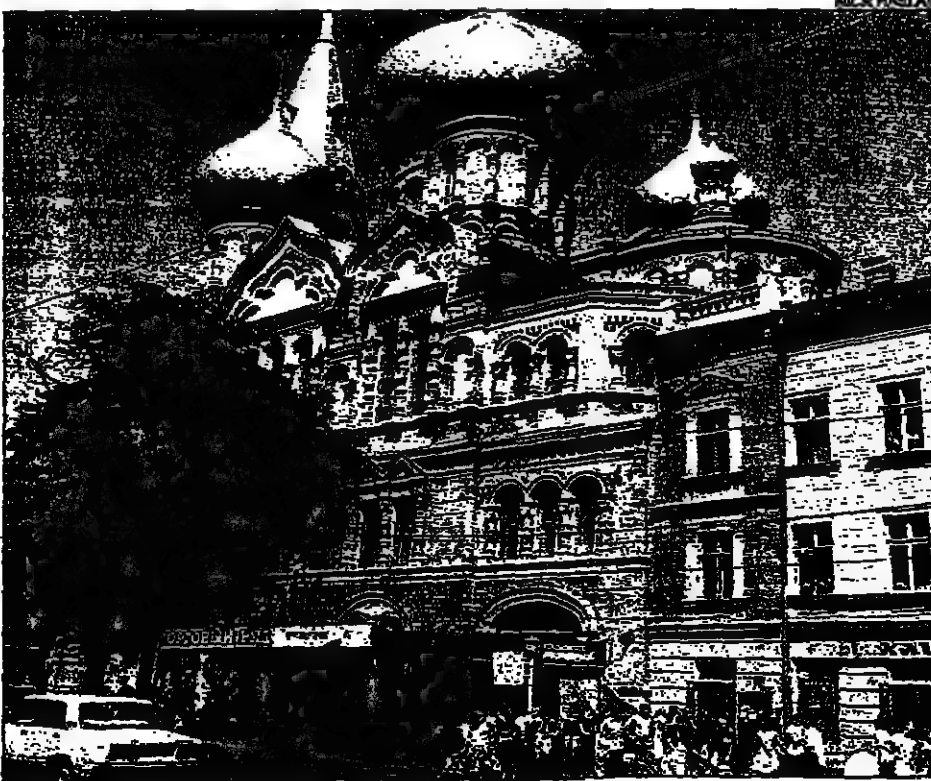
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SKI WEEKEND CANADA

Northern resorts are poles apart

I HAVE seen the future of skiing, and it is in Canada. Largely, it is the vision of the man leading me up the snow steps of Sparky's Ladder on Blackcomb Mountain at Whistler.

Hugh Smythe started as a lowly labourer on Whistler Mountain when what is now the No. 1 resort in North America was little more than a few lifts running up from the town rubbish dump. He worked his way up through the ranks on Whistler Mountain, and now oversees them both, as well as an empire of nine other resorts.

For the first time, Whistler and Blackcomb — previously separately owned and uneasily co-existing within Whistler Resort — will open under co-or-

dated management, joined with Mont Tremblant, Panorama and Mont Ste Marie in Canada as well as with Copper Mountain and Mammoth in America, under the Intrawest label.

What does this mean for the holiday skier? I have to stop to take a breath. The heavy Whistler powder on Sparky's steep off-piste slopes is beating me to a pulp. Smythe pulls up 50m down the double-diamond, expert-rated Ruby Bowl to wait for me. He is a skier.

And that is something unique about Canada. Unlike in America or the Alps, all of its major resorts are owned or operated by hard-core skiers such as Charlie Locke (owner of five Alberta areas including Canada's largest, Lake Louise), Ralph Scurfield (energetic owner

of Sunshine in Alberta), Skat Petersen (charismatic proprietor of Red Mountain in British Columbia), and Canada's most famous skiing family, the Olympic champion Nancy Greene and her husband Al Raine, the genius responsible for Whistler Village. They've left Whistler behind and now supervise Canada's fastest-developing small resort, Sun Peaks in British Columbia.

I have skied with them all. And were I to hazard a comment on who is the best, there would be blood on the slopes. That's how seriously Canadians take



their skiing, and their resorts.

But Smythe wins hands down in terms of who has the most resorts to play with. As president of Intrawest's resort operations, he supervises not only the nine North American resorts Intrawest owns, but also property developments worth hundreds of millions of dollars in both Squaw Valley in California and Keystone in Colorado.

In Canada, more money is being poured into skiing than anywhere else in the world. Intrawest, a Canadian-owned company, has just announced a plan for

2002 for its eastern flagship, Mont Tremblant, which will push spending there up to almost C\$1 billion. Government co-operation with skiing development is better in Canada than anywhere else. It is the only nation where entire ski areas as well as resort towns — such as Banff — are permitted to expand within the boundaries of national parks.

NOWHERE ELSE is new skiing terrain being carved out so expansively. There is scarcely a Canadian resort without new lifts or new terrain announced each year.

Sunshine's Goat's Eye nearly doubled that resort's skiing area. Fernie has announced plans to expand twofold. Having opened one entire new mountain a few years ago, Silver Star is now

blazing new trails into the Valhalla Adventure Area. This season Norway opens a new sector, the American Basin. Whistler, Big White, Red Mountain, Tremblant, Lake Louise... all have new lifts, ski runs or lodges for this winter.

This is not to say that Canada is yet perfect. It is too cold for comfort, until March, for most holiday skiers used to the Alps.

Whistler is the only Canadian resort to come close to the range and scope of skiing in European destinations such as Val d'Isère or Verbier. Indeed, it would be wrong to say that Canada has anywhere near the best skiing in the world, but it is probably right to say that it is the only place where skiing is going to get radically better in the future.

SHOOT-OFFSHOOT

BRITISH COLUMBIA

A dual mountain ski-pass gives skiers the run of both Blackcomb and Whistler mountains but the only crossover is at the bottom of Whistler Village. Respectively, these mountains are number one and number two in terms of vertical drop in North America, with Blackcomb's skiing falling one vertical mile down challenging couloirs, open bowls and twisting gullies.

Whistler's snow is deep, its grooming impeccable and its pistes adored by intermediates. But it rains in the village and the snow is often heavy and sticky.

There are several excellent restaurants, better ski shops than in the Alps, and a good range of chalets and ski-to-the-door hotels, the most impressive of which is the Chateau Whistler, opening this season after a £20-million expansion project.

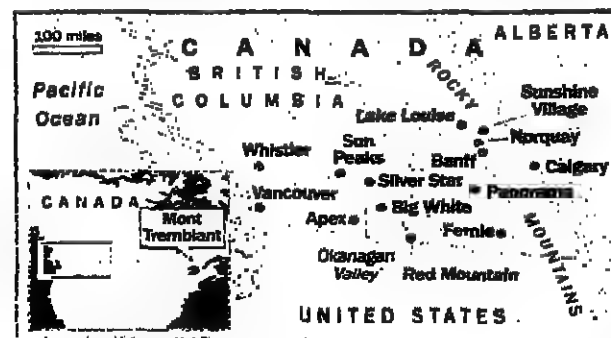
Sun Peaks is western Canada's most impressive work in progress. An entire new village has been constructed, three major hotels this summer. Almost an hour from nowhere — Kamloops, BC — Sun Peaks is a paradise for skiers who can't stand queues and who don't much like seeing any other tracks but their own in the powder.

In the Okanagan Valley, the family resorts of Silver Star, Big White and Apex guarantee uncrowded slopes, high snow levels and low prices. Silver Star has a superb ski school and a tiny village that looks just like the set from a John Ford western. Big White is even smaller, but with deep powder. Apex has outstanding skiing at modest prices.

Family orientated Panorama has the third-highest vertical drop in North America and is the base for RK Helicopter Skiing. Now getting more attention in Britain, Fernie is renowned for its friendly folk and cheap accommodation in what used to be a mining town. Being close to the Continental Divide, it has some of the best powder snow in Canada.

A legend among skiers who fly in from all over North America for its unconstructed ambience and rough terrain, Red Mountain is a time warp of stripped-down skiing: snow, snow and more snow.

Condos may be under construction in the potholed parking lot, but the lifts are still slow and second-hand. And at the Red Shunter Inn, at the bottom of the slopes, the wine is not only bottled but kitted, "en maison".



ALBERTA

Banff is far and away the most popular Canadian destination. Breathtakingly beautiful, the town nestles in national parkland where elk really do roam the streets. Hotels are a dream, especially the 850-room Banff Springs and the Chateau Lake Louise, set off with a hanging

glacier. Primarily a summer resort, Banff is surprisingly cheap in winter.

It is possible to ski all three Banff resorts — Norquay, Sunshine and Lake Louise — on one ski pass. Norquay is just on the outskirts of Banff and popular for families and night skiing. Norquay's groomed intermediate slopes are so carpet-smooth that the resort happily offers the world's only such guarantee: ski for an hour, and if the grooming isn't perfect, you get your money back.

Lake Louise has serious scope and variety: trees, bowls and chutes. But even though it is the largest single area in Canada, Lake Louise can be skied in a day or two. The new Whiskeyjack Lodge, in stunning hand-cut timber, is one of the most impressive in North America. Sunshine Village straddles the Continental Divide and has the most sensa-

tional natural snow I have ever skied, but it is also blasted by cold winds. The recently opened Goat's Eye mountain has the kind of open off-piste that skiers from the Alps crave.

HOW TO GO

The Canada This Winter guide can be ordered from the Visit Canada Centre (0891 715000: 50p per minute). About 58 tour operators go to Canada, the same number as last year; only France attracts more UK operators, with 78. Thomson, Crystal, Inghams and Airtours all offer charter flights to Calgary and Vancouver this season; Neilson and First Choice go to Calgary only. And all six offer both Whistler and Banff.

Inghams (0181-780 4444) has the biggest programme, with 11 resorts. Crystal (0181-399

5144) offers an unusual option on its Jasper holidays, stopping over in Edmonton at the world's largest shopping mall.

Thomson (0990 329329) proposes two-centre holidays in Sun Peaks and Whistler. First Choice (0990 557755) counts Mont Tremblant among its six resorts. Neilson (0990 994444) has multi-resort holidays moving among Whistler, Banff and Jasper.

Airtours (01706 232324) confines its choice to the Banff resorts and Whistler, but with some good chalets in the latter. Ski the American Dream (0181-552 1201) was the first firm to feature North America and now offers a rated service in six Canadian resorts. Frontier Ski (0181-776 8709) is one of the pioneering firms to Canada, featuring all the resorts reviewed above, plus safaris and snowcat skiing.

Ski Independence (0990 550855) features four Canadian resorts. Ski Safari (0171-262 5069) started only last year but already covers all the small resorts reviewed above. Made to Measure (01243 533333) and Momentum Travel (0171-371 9111) are experienced tailor-made specialists. Other operators include All Canada (01502 565176) and Skisworld (0171-602 4324).

For Internet users, here are some useful Web sites. Details of all the Intrawest resorts at <http://www.intrawest.com>. Information on skiing in BC is at <http://skicentral.com/britishcolumbia.html>. Safety information is at <http://www.cscac.org>.



Lake Louise offers serious scope and variety with trees, bowls and chutes

WORLD PICTURES

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Wild

SKI WEEKEND: HELI-SKIING



Canadian firms have built up 30 years' worth of experience and infrastructure, which gives skiers the reassurance of rescue helicopters, emergency bivouacs, avalanche evaluation and weather and communications stations

Wild times with the ultimate ski lift

Whump... whump... whump. The rotors of the Bell 212 JetRanger pound through the crisp Arctic air like hammer blows, in sync with my elevated heartbeat and with a low-frequency force I can feel to the soles of my feet.

The pilot roars over our kneeling, huddled group and kicks the clattering machine into a tail-high stall turn, diving steeply and driving flat across the glacier floor to slide in inches away from my outstretched hand.

As designated doorman, I catch the pilot's eye, pop the hatch open and usher my nine fellow heli-hounds on board. They all wear goofy grins, some more ridiculously rimmed than others from heli-skiing tumbles through the thigh-deep powder snow we've just ferried into thick furrows down 1,800 vertical feet.

I put on the rear cabin headset to listen in. The pilot and our chief guide, Mike Wiegele, are deep into a tactical discussion: headwinds, and which hill to attack next. Over the years, I've done some 1.5 million vertical feet of this kind of skiing. But I am bouncing with enthusiasm to do it again, and Mike is radioing ahead to push back lunch. He too wants to squeeze in one more run.

Helicopter skiing is simply the most fun you can have in the snow. A full season of resort skiing is no match for just one week of helicopter skiing at Mike's 3,000-square-

mile powder playground in the Monashee and Cariboo ranges of interior British Columbia.

Much nonsense has been written about helicopter skiing, usually by those who have experienced only resort-based operations, or the even more limited flights permitted in the Alps.

Some outdated myths persist: helicopter skiing is said to be unconscionably dangerous, unaffordably expensive and only for experts.

Many skiers are confused by what are entirely different types of helicopter skiing. A day anywhere is good for a trial. But nothing compares to a full week in Canada, staying in remote lodges and flying out every day, all day into the wilderness. This is the classic helicopter skiing experience, invented in Canada almost 30 years ago and today best represented by the world's two largest operations, CMH and Mike Wiegele (MW), both of whom feature huge territories — bigger than all the ski resorts in Europe put together — under concession from the Canadian Government.

In a week, skiers can easily ski 150,000 vertical feet of open glacier and densely forested terrain, the helicopter waiting at the bottom of each run.

Smaller Canadian operations based near ski resorts, such as the three in Whistler, have less expansive terrain but offer the ideal opportunity to try helicopter skiing for just a few runs. The skiing standard there is generally intermedi-

Forget those ill-informed critics: helicopter skiing with an expert organisation is the best fun you can have on snow, says Doug Sager



Outdated myths persist that heli-skiing is expensive and for experts only: modern reality in Canada is different

ate, and runs less impressive than with MW or CMH. A package of three runs costs about £200.

Canadian-style helicopter skiing, where helicopters can take off and land anywhere, is illegal in the Alps. Helicopter skiing is banned altogether in France, ecologically unacceptable in Austria, and allowed only in certain regions of

Switzerland (most notably Zermatt and Verbier) and in Italy, best on the Monte Bianco and Monte Rosa massifs.

In Europe, helicopters are allowed only to land at specifically designated points and altitudes. A single flight in Italy starts at about £50, and is nearer £125 in Switzerland.

There is no landing zone in the Alps that is not accessible

— sometimes fairly easily — to skiers climbing uphill. I have witnessed mountain-top confrontations in Switzerland with ski tourists, who resent helicopter skiers taking the easy way up. Alpine helicopter skiers are often forced into long traverses in order to ski to valley floors to pick up road transportation home.

The danger in Canadian

helicopter skiing is more innate than invited. Flying in helicopters and landing them spectacularly, in some instances on knife-edge ridges, is one element of risk. Weather is another. Wilderness terrain can be as unwelcoming as the open ocean. Avalanches are a constant hazard, as is the less-publicised but no less fatal phenomenon of tree wells:

helicopter skiers risk suffocation if they fall into holes left around tree trunks where falling snow has been blocked by overhanging branches.

These are the inescapable downsides of skiing anywhere in true wilderness, compensated for by the experience and infrastructure that Canadian helicopter skiing firms have built up during the past three decades.

Standby rescue helicopters, remote emergency bivouacs, weather and communications stations and constant avalanche evaluation provide some reassurance. But helicopter skiers depend ultimately upon themselves and their guides.

Discipline is essential. Every skier undergoes proficiency exercises in avalanche transceiver. All have hands-on training in helicopter evacuation. Any skier failing to ski within bounds delineated by the guide is sent home. No one approaches even a shut-down helicopter with skis carried higher than waist level.

It is the thrill of deep snow lying as nature intended that excites the wilderness skier. And the wilderness can never be entered without risk. In the history of Canadian helicopter skiing, one skier per year is killed on average. In a similar 30-year period, on average 80 skiers per year die in the Alps from avalanches alone. In the hedonistic calculus,

helicopter skiing is a bargain. For the passionate skier with more money than time, measured on a scale of vertical feet skied in, multiplied by feet of deep powder snow of such a degree of crystalline quality — minus hours spent standing in lift queues — Canadian helicopter skiing comes in at a fraction of the cost of resort skiing anywhere. A week at MW, including all helicopter flights, guide fees, meals and accommodation, starts at around £2,500 (excluding flights from Britain).

And you certainly do not have to be an expert to do it. I have heli-skied with children of seven and grandmothers of 70. The secret is wide-body powder skis, about the dimensions of waterskis. These add ten years to any skier's experience and have reduced injuries dramatically. Both MW and CMH have courses for absolute powder beginners. And no one in any group is pushed beyond their limits.

There are some objective reasons for choosing MW over CMH. At CMH, one helicopter is assigned to four groups of eleven skiers, with only one guide per group. This means much longer waiting periods for pickups than with MW, where one helicopter services only three groups of ten skiers at most.

More crucially for safety, MW always uses two guides per group. That means one additional fully equipped guide behind you as backup, not just one guide hundreds of metres ahead.

GIVE IT A WHIRL - SAFELY AND SECURELY

■ I have skied with all the firms listed below, except TLS and Klondike, both highly rated by experienced helicopter skiers who used them last season. Among Canadian specialists, James Orr (0171-580 7833) is a new UK travel agent specialising only in helicopter skiing. He can book the romantic TLS (formerly Tyax Lodge); remote Klondike in the Yukon and Revelstoke-based Selkirk Tangiers, as well as Mike Wiegele. MW can also be booked direct at Blue River headquarters (001 250 673 8381). Klondike accepts direct bookings (001 604 938 0727).

■ Powder Skiing North America (0171-736 8191) is the UK agent for CMH, which cannot be booked direct. Frontier Ski (0181-776 8709) represents RK Heli-Skiing, based at the family resort of Panorama, and all three Whistler-based day helicopter operations.

■ In the Alps, Ski Weekend (01367 241636) is Britain's most ambitious tour organiser for serious as well as for novice helicopter skiers. The Ski

Company (0171-730 9600) offers thrilling descents on the Rutor glacier from its Yellowstone Chalet in St Foy, France. Powder Byre (0181-871 3300) has helicopter skiing options in the Grindelwald region. And Collineige (01276 24262) has a long-standing programme of Swiss and Italian descents for its Chamonix clients.

■ Check you are fully insured before helicopter skiing. Crystal and Inghams are the only mainstream tour operators whose insurance specifically includes helicopter skiing, but only as part of their package holidays. Snowcard (01327 262805) is one of the few specialist insurers with full off-piste and helicopter skiing cover for independent skiers, valid world-wide.

■ Some of the heli-ski companies listed, such as the overseas-based ones, are not bonded. This means your money is not protected if the company gets into financial difficulties. Pay by credit card for the protection it affords, and book your air ticket separately with an agent that holds an ATOL, ABTA or IATA licence.

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The programme commences with a flight from Gatwick to San Jose, before transferring to the Pacific coast. For our 15-night stay we have arranged accommodation at the sophisticated, European managed 4-star Playa Tambor Hotel situated on its own glorious beach and ideal for a relaxing stay or as a base from which to explore the national parks.

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TRAVEL CONTINUES ON PAGE 28

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Forget auld acquaintance, for singles there is a jollier way to celebrate New Year's Eve, says Jo Carlowe



The cast of *This Life* may not be too bothered about who sleeps where, but if you don't want to end up on a crowded couch book a holiday cottage with enough beds

This Life is great for a party

Celebrating the new year is always tricky for the single twenty-and thirty-somethings. You are too old to go clubbing, too young to be sipping port in front of the television, and not so desperate that you want to go home to your family.

The solution? Hire a cottage, grab a party of like-minded friends and hole up in the middle of nowhere for a week. It is exactly what the cast of *This Life* or *Friends* would do if they went away together for new year.

The idea of getting away from it all with a group of unattached friends is a very 1990s thing. This is the decade in which single power has become a force to be reckoned with. One need look no further than the popularity of the two cult television shows to know that friends have become surrogate family.

And so it is that professional twenty- and thirty-somethings, with time off work and cash to spare, are teaming up in droves to see in the new year away from their extended family and childbearing, nappy-wielding peers.

Lisa, 32, met her husband-to-be, Nicky, 36, an antique jeweller dealer, on such a cottage holiday. "When it came to New Year's Eve, I was always worried I would not be



Getaway people: back row, from left, Fiona, Graham and Judith. Front: Lisa and Nicky. Right: stars of *Friends*

invited anywhere or, if I was, that it would get to midnight and I would be the only one without someone to kiss," said Lisa, a schoolteacher from Barnet, north London. One year she traipsed to Trafalgar Square, only to spend the whole night trying to avoid the lunging lips of passing inebriates. "I loathed New Year's Eve so much that I used to offer to babysit — and this special night came to mean babysitting," she said. Two years ago everything changed. Lisa teamed up with a friend, Fiona, a 33-year-old

BBC broadcast assistant from Harpenden, north London, who was already a veteran of the cottage boom. "We wanted to escape, to spend the new year with friends somewhere nice in the country and make a whole week of it. In this way, New Year's Eve itself would lose its significance and there would be no anti-climax," Lisa said. Aware that New Year's Eve was fast approaching, they took a risk and booked a cottage for eight, confident that the vacant places would be easy to fill. They plumped for somewhere situated off the beaten track, at Ross-on-Wye, Herefordshire. It cost about £400 — cheap when divided eight ways.

Fiona wanted an equal gender divide. She found four willing female friends, but getting the men was more tricky. Taking a gung-ho approach, she asked two men she hardly knew. She had seen them at a couple of social functions and decided they would fit in. Finally, an eclectic

'I loathed New Year's Eve so much that I used to be quite happy to babysit for all my friends'

group was gathered: an Irish lawyer, several London professionals, and Nicky. Two weeks before going on holiday they all met up in a cafe to discuss the shopping and transport arrangements. For some it was the first time they had met. Judith, 32, an office manager, described it as a compromise between going away with close friends and joining a singles holiday with total strangers. By December, three of the men were no longer single but they went anyway. "I tried to have intimate telephone conversations with my new girlfriend but the others were always around," complained Graham, 37, a personnel officer. Another group member confessed: "Graham is a romantic. His calls were a little flowery, a bit gushing. We couldn't help but listen in."

The most enjoyable aspect was the general laid-back feeling of the week — a great relief after a frenetic year at work. Days tended to begin with a

late breakfast, which sometimes carried over into lunch and afternoon tea. Some days involved sight-seeing or country strolls, while others, according to Graham, consisted of a never-ending quest for the "ultimate cream tea". The evenings were equally stress-free, with the cold tempered by alcohol, chat and the occasional game of Trivial Pursuit.

"Everyone was so easy-going, and besides the weather was so atrocious that no one would have been able to go stomping off as everything was under five inches of ice," Lisa said. New Year's Eve itself was spent in the pub, ruined by a two-man band "murdering" old ballads. "If this had been New Year's Eve at home it would have been terrible, but because we had the whole week it didn't matter," she said.

Of course, not all group holidays run like an episode of *The Waltons*. John, 29, a journalist, found little to celebrate when he joined his girlfriend and mates at their holiday cottage. The others had arrived several days earlier. John had failed to realise that the icy British winter would compound the sense of

group warmth that was building up inside the beamed cottage with its open fire. The extreme cold, combined with a heady mix of free-flowing alcohol and a festive attitude, proved a dangerous cocktail. By the time John arrived, he found his place as boyfriend had been usurped by another — more *This Life* than *Friends*.

However, the Nicky/Lisa romance was all above board, although it did not really start until a month later. "During the week I couldn't take my eyes off her, but there was the pressure of the group, so if I had tried anything and it had not worked out I would have ended up with egg on my face," Nicky said.

The couple are to marry in April — with young bridesmaids. "All those New Year's Eves spent babysitting weren't in vain after all," Lisa said.

HOW TO PLAN YOUR ESCAPE

THE larger the group, and the more popular the area, the earlier you need to book for Christmas and new year. "For this year, most of the larger properties have gone," says Mike Dean, of Blakes Cottages. "Places with chalet roofs and open fires tend to go first, as do those in central locations such as the Cotswolds. People like New Year's Eve in a castle, so if you want a quirky property, book a year in advance. But groups of six to eight people prepared to go off the beaten track can still find places."

HOUSEHOLD TIPS

"A prerequisite of any house party is a decent ratio of bathrooms, showers and WCs. Heating should be good and open fires or wood-burning stoves are essential," says Rural Retreats.

WHO DOES WHAT

Blakes Cottages (01282 445555) has more than 2,000 properties, ranging from cottages to castles. English Country Cottages (01949 851155) provides properties for between two and 22 people. Rural Retreats (01386 701177) offers new year accommodation for a minimum of five nights. The Landmark Trust (01628 825925) has restored buildings of historic or architectural interest. Helpful Holidays (01647 435953) has properties in Devon, Cornwall and Somerset. Other operators include Country Holidays (01282 445095), Northumbria Coast and Country Cottages (01665 830783), Welsh Country Cottages (01328 851341), Country Cottages in Scotland (01328 564011) and West Country Cottages (01626 333678). Individual owners often advertise in the classified columns of *The Times* and *The Sunday Times*.

THIS NEW YEAR

Prices are per week over new year, unless otherwise stated.

SCOTLAND

■ Blenheim House, near Tarnberry, Strathclyde. An Edwardian house, sleeping 14, set in a 64-acre estate; seven bedrooms with an en suite bathroom; six with king-size beds and one four poster. Includes croquet lawn and piano; £3,361 plus £50 for heating through Blakes.

WELSH

■ The Nicolle Tower, Jersey

Wales

■ Archer House in Anglesey

sleeps eight with two

bedrooms and three WCs. Set

on an 850-acre farm. Excellent

trout fishing; £667. (English

Country Cottages)

WEST COUNTRY

The following are available

through Helpful Holidays:

■ The Fort, Rame Head,

Cornwall, sleeps 20 in eight

bedrooms (all with sea views)

plus eight bathrooms; hard

tennis court; £3,264.

■ Alston Manor Hall,

Holbeton, near Plymouth. A

first-floor apartment with

indoor and outdoor pools, five

acres of land, sauna, gym.

Two double bedrooms, one

single. Sleeps 5-6; £194.

■ Ocean View Bungalow,

Hope Cove, Devon. Views

across bay, open fire, four

bedrooms (three doubles, one

twin). Sleeps 8-9; £923.

■ Gib House, 16th-century

property by Dartmoor; sleeps

four in two bedrooms; £732.

EAST ANGLIA

■ Brindle House, Wroxham,

Norfolk, sleeps eight in one

double bedroom, two twins

and two singles; £970 (English

Country Cottages)

■ Grange Barn, a converted

barn near Reepham, Norfolk,

sleeps four in double and twin

room, one bathroom; £772

(Rural Retreats).

NORTH OF ENGLAND

■ Hummer's Hollow,

Northumberland, sleeps seven

in two doubles, a twin and a

single; two bathrooms; £837.

(Rural Retreats)

■ Swarkestone Pavilion,

Derbyshire, sleeps two; roof

terrace; £267 (Landmark Trust).

JERSEY

■ The Nicolle Tower, St

Clement's, octagonal tower

occupied by the Germans

during the war; sleeps two;

£368 (Landmark Trust).



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■ Gib House, 16th-century

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■ Brindle House, Wroxham,

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and two singles; £970 (English

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■ Grange Barn, a converted

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(Rural Retreats).

NORTH OF ENGLAND

■ Hummer's Hollow,

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in two doubles, a twin and a

single; two bathrooms; £837.

(Rural Retreats)

■ Swarkestone Pavilion,

Derbyshire, sleeps two; roof

terrace; £267 (Landmark Trust).

JERSEY

■ The Nicolle Tower, St

Clement's, octagonal tower

occupied by the Germans

during the war; sleeps two;

£368 (Landmark Trust).



Interior of Hunter's Hollow in Northumberland



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AROUND THE WORLD A WEEKEND GUIDE

Now tourism collapses



Firemen survey the 13th-century bell tower at Foligno, just one of Italy's medieval treasures damaged by four earthquakes and 90 smaller tremors

Shattered by the recent earthquakes, Assisi will also have to count the cost in lost visitors, says Steve Keenan

The Italian earthquake that devastated the Basilica of St Francis is expected to result in long-term tourism losses for the town of Assisi. With the upper church closed for at least two years, several tour operators to Umbria are rescheduling their 1998 programmes to Assisi.

Another company this week wrote to customers cancelling an annual Christmas Eve visit to the basilica for Midnight Mass. The Alternative Travel Group had staged the event for the past three years and expected another full complement of 16 visitors this year.

Chris Whitney, the company's managing director, said the cancellation was inevitable

as work continues to assess damage to the 13th-century basilica. But while Assisi will lose visitor revenues, he said many customers were seeking ways to make donations to the rebuilding of the basilica and other monuments in Umbria.

"We have had a lot of people wanting to contribute. There have been 40 to 50 letters. They are very upset on behalf of the people of the area and the loss of their livelihoods."

The company will still offer Assisi in its 1998 brochure. But other operators, including Ramblers Holidays and Pros-

pect Music and Art Tours, have replaced the town with other Italian destinations.

Attracted by the basilica — the biggest tourist draw of the region — visitors pack Assisi during the summer. Yassin Sethna, a spokeswoman for Magic of Italy, said: "Most of the towns in Umbria are medieval and the best attraction of Assisi is the basilica, which is one of the most stunning in Italy."

Damage caused by earthquakes in central Italy forced

the company to stop taking bookings for all but one of its hotels in Assisi, including the Subasio next to the basilica.

But, in common with other operators to Italy, the main earthquake on September 26 was within three weeks of the summer tourist season ending and relatively few British tourists were affected.

Those who cancelled travel plans were primarily holiday-makers making a pilgrimage to Assisi, specifically to visit the basilica, including three people who booked through the Dublin office of Italitour.



Its currency may be in turmoil, but Hong Kong is still buzzing. Departing from Heathrow on Wednesday and Thursday, Qantas Holidays (0990 673464) has return flights and five night's room-only accommodation at the Grand Tower Hotel for £599, reduced from £899 — a saving of £300. Extra nights from £65 per person. British Airways Holidays (0990 224224) has Hong Kong breaks departing before November 30: three nights at the Westley Hotel cost from £299 per person including scheduled flights from Heathrow and room-only accommodation.

Oxford is being taken over from today to November 2, music fans will head for Radio 1 Sound City (01865 704494), an indie dance extravaganza at various venues. The Lightning Seeds, Sleeper, Dubstar, and DJs Judge Jules and Pete Tong are among the acts appearing. Contact the tourist office (01865 726871) for accommodation.

Enjoy Halloween at one of Scotland's many haunted hotels. The Meddum Hotel (01651 872294), Oldmeldrum, Aberdeenshire, offers half-board accommodation for £114 per person per night — and possibly the "White Lady", famous for her icy embrace. A lone bagpiper haunts The Colquhoun Hotel (01975 651210) in Strathdon, Aberdeenshire, which has half-board accommoda-

Departures Monday October 27 to Saturday November 1, 1997: Lowest available published fares for return travel.			
Route	Promotional Fare	Flexible Fare	
London - Amsterdam	from £58 Easyjet (ex-Luton)	£199 Transavia (ex-Gatwick)	
London - Berlin	£90 Air UK/KLM (ex-Heathrow/Stansted/City)	£470 BA (ex-Heathrow)	
London - Dublin	from £50 Ryanair (ex-Stansted/Luton)	from £50 Ryanair (ex-Stansted/Luton)	
London - Edinburgh	from £58 Easyjet (ex-Luton)	£198 BA (ex-Heathrow/Gatwick)	
Manchester - Madrid	£96 Iberia	£610 Iberia	
London - New York	from £120 BA/£209 BA Islandair (ex-Heathrow)	£844 BA (ex-Heathrow/Gatwick)	
London - Prague	£149 BM (ex-Heathrow)	£422 BM (ex-Heathrow)	
London - Paris	£56 BA/£56 BA (ex-Heathrow)	£222 BA (ex-Heathrow)	
Manchester - Paris	£108 BA/£139 BA Air France	£415 Air France	
London - Rome	£126 Air UK/KLM (ex-Heathrow/Stansted)	£335 BA (ex-Heathrow)	

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Transavia: 01293 596650

Notes:
* one-way fares only
* Prices shown in the left-hand column are the lowest published excursion fares. Prices shown in the right-hand column are the lowest available flexible fares which do not require a Saturday night stay and which, in many cases, allow changes or cancellations without penalty. In all cases you are advised to check the restrictions. If any, when booking.
* Availability is not guaranteed.
* Fares shown do not include any applicable taxes or security fees.

for £42.50 per person per night. More information from the Scottish Tourist Board (0131-332 2433).

A week's sunbathing in The Gambia is £289 per person

JOANNA HUNTER

It's all a question of tax

AIR Passenger Duty (APD) doubles to £10 for European Union countries and £20 for long-haul destinations from next Saturday, but most airlines are still not including the tax in their advertised prices.

Passenger groups feel customers are being misled into buying tickets without knowing the full cost, and are urging the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) to recommend that the practice be scrapped.

When the increase takes effect, it will cost £80 in duty for a family of four to visit Florida, instead of £40 at present. The Air Transport Users Council, a watchdog body, believes duty has reached such a high level that airlines should be obliged to include the tax in their advertised prices. "We want people to know about all the various costs they're having to pay at the time of booking," said the Council. "The problem is that airlines are reluctant to change

their ways because they feel it might affect business. That's not being honest." Airlines, however, say the Government is using them as a way of raising taxes. By separating APD from the standard cost of the ticket customers know how their money is being spent.

All tour operators that are members of ABTA (the Association of British Travel Agents) have agreed to include duty in package-holiday prices, but many which have flight-only wings have been reluctant to add duty to flight prices. They feel this would put them at a competitive disadvantage against airlines.

The ASA is investigating the problem and is due to report its findings in mid-November. It said: "Consumers should not be misled by advertisements and we may well ask airlines to include duty in prices."

TOM CHESSEHYRE

JILL CRAWSHAW'S TRAVEL TIPS

Take a break in Brisbane

CAN WE look forward to package holidays in Brisbane instead of Bodrum, swap the Canaries for Cairns or Sorrento for Sydney, now that the Thomson Travel Group, Britain's largest tour-operating organisation, has bought Austravel? Thomson says it does not plan to offer packages immediately and the Australasia specialist will continue to trade under its own name. But Thomson is clearly eyeing the growing market for holidays Down Under — as opposed to trips taken by "VFR passengers" (Visiting Friends and Relations). About 450,000 of us head to Australia each year. Charles Newbold, Thomson Group's managing director, anticipates a considerable boost from travellers to the millennium celebrations and Sydney Olympics in 2000, but his first aim is to increase sales in continental Europe.

Santa Claus is flying high

YES, Father Christmas is alive and waiting for special British Airways red-nosed Boeing 737s to take to the sky over Manchester. The 45-minute Santa Specials start on December 7 and will operate every weekend up to and including Christmas Eve. For 567 passengers take part in a search for Santa in the sky until he suddenly appears with his high-flying sleigh and sacks of presents. For more information call 0161-852 7972.

Picked pockets

POLICE in Budapest have stepped in to curb pickpocketing. Squads of tourist police patrol the streets and are easily identified by their blue baseball caps. Apparently, two gangs of pickpockets have been put out of



Watch out for the wildlife: road signs along the Nullarbor Plain in South Australia

action already by the police presence.

The Hungarian National Tourist Board (0171-823 1032) expects about 250,000 Britons to visit Hungary this year.

TAKE the panic out of Christmas catering on a three-day cookery workshop at The Riverside at Helford, Cornwall (01865 400825). Clare Latimer, who has catered for prime ministers and who began her cooking career at Helford, will advise on recipes including stuffing for the Christmas goose and other traditional foods. The course runs from November 14-16 and costs £175 per person for accommodation, all meals and cookery demos.

Stepping out

TWO tour operators, specialists in different continents, have joined forces to offer customers tailor-made holidays in Africa and Asia. Steppes East (01288 810267) was created in 1989 to capitalise on tourism potential in Eastern Europe following the fall of the Berlin Wall. The company now bridges the Indian sub-continent and

South-East Asia. This year it bought Art of Travel (0171-738 2038), which has made its name in southern and eastern Africa and the islands of the Indian Ocean.

In its new brochure, Art of Travel has prices from £2,060 for a 16-day Zimbabwe safari to £3,640 for a 17-day Bushmen of the Kalahari tour in Botswana, while Steppes East has expanded further into Vietnam, Laos and Indonesia, while adding Borneo and Malaysia. Its sample itineraries start at £1,850 for 12 nights in Sarawak, Malaysia.

Spanish scam

HOLIDAYMAKERS should beware of a scam operating in the queue to cross from the Spanish town of La Linea into Gibraltar. Waiting to cross recently to catch a homeward flight from the colony, we and others with Spanish-registered cars were approached by a group of hustlers. "You will need a 1,000-peseta ticket to take your vehicle back into Gibraltar," one of the villains told us, attempting to force a grubby yellow ticket under the windscreen wipers. He pursued us, saying "you will never get across without this",

before tackling the next potential victim. This scam is operating despite warning signs (visible after the point where the spivs operated) that entry to Gibraltar is free and all you need is your passport.

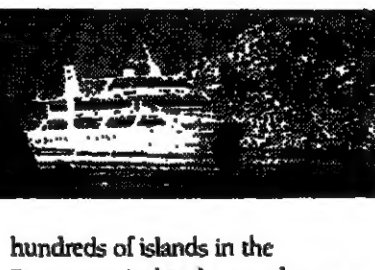
If you do not want to queue to return your hire car — sometimes more than an hour's delay — hire firms will allow you to leave vehicles on the Spanish side of the border. There are two snags: you may have to carry your luggage across and you have to top up your tank with much more expensive Spanish petrol.

VIENNA'S 700-year-old Advent markets begin this year on November 15, and a new museum is opening on November 27 in the vaults of the Stallburg palace. It is dedicated to the dancing white Lipizzaner horses with displays which trace the history of the Spanish Riding School since it was founded in 1572. The highlight is watching the Lipizzaners in action. The museum is open daily (except Mondays) 10am-6pm; entrance for adults is AS\$0 (£2.50). Contact the Austrian National Tourist Office in London (0171-629 0461).



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Rarely visited in any depth because of the undeveloped nature of the region, it is a wonderful place for the genuine traveller to explore. There are so many highlights it is difficult to know where to begin. From the tidal phenomena at Montgomery Reef to the horizontal waterfalls near Talbot Bay; from the

hundreds of islands in the Buccaneer Archipelago to the gorges of the Mitchell, King George and Prince Regent rivers and from the fertile Ord River Valley to Lake Argyle. The whole vast area offers a cornucopia of natural world delights on a scale seldom witnessed anywhere else in the world.

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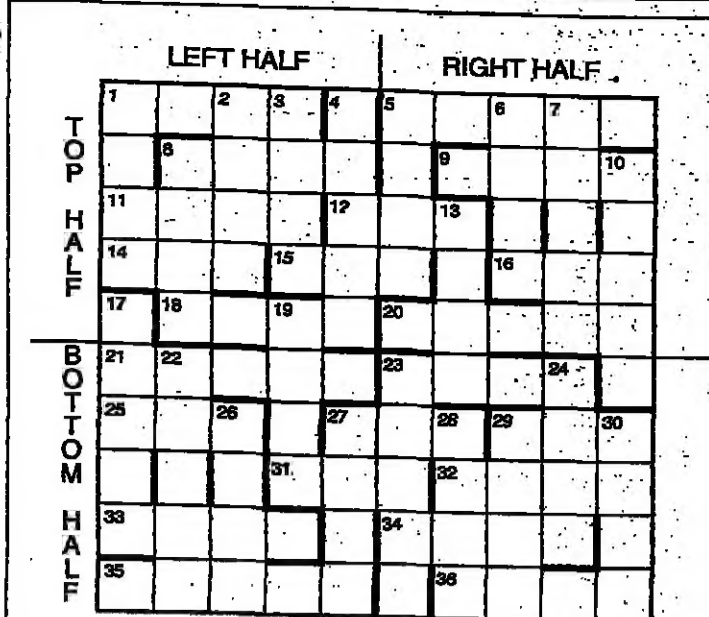
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THE letters P, R, I, M, E and S each represent one of the prime numbers two, three, five, seven, eleven and thirteen but the numerical values of the letters (which are to be deduced by the solver) are different in each of the four halves of the diagram, across entries being divided into top and bottom halves, down entries into left and right halves; no letter has the same value in different halves.

Before entry in the diagram, each answer must be transformed to one of the number bases between two and eleven inclusive; one row and one column of the diagram correspond to each number base. If necessary, in base eleven use X to stand for ten; for example 1690 (base ten) would appear as 12X7 (base eleven).

Clues follow the normal rules of algebraic notation, only asterisked clues lead to palindromic diagram entries, and no diagram entry has zero as its first digit.

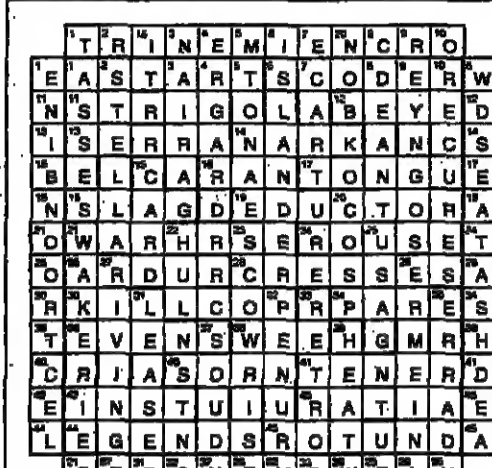
18 PERM
20 EERIE
21 MR
23 PS
25 MM
27 (S + E + E)R
29 SEES
31 MM + MR
32 M + I + M + E + MIMES
33 SSS
34 PIE + PIE
35 PEEP + PEEPS
36 MP + PIMP

DOWN

1 RIPP
2 SRS
3 SESS
4 PEP
5 RISES
6 EME
7 (S + E + E + M + E) (S + I + M + P + E + R)
8 PEPPE + R + S
10 EMP (I + R + E) + EMP (R + E + S + S)
13 REMISS
17 PRIME + PIES + M + I + S + S
19 IM (P + R + I + M + E + S)
22 PEEPS
23 SEE + SIMPS + SIP + P + E + P + S + I
24 PEP - SI
26 ERR
27 PS
28 PIPE - R
29 (M + E + R + S)E
30 PRESS - ERS

ACROSS

*1 PI
5 RIP
8 PRIM
9 P (P + R + I + M + E + R + S)
11 ISIS
12 PIE
14 PIPER
15 SIRS
16 PS + PPS



Solution and notes for No 3433
A Catalogue by Apex

CORRECT LETTERS: WATERSTONE'S
MEMBERS DONATIONS: PLAYWRIGHTS

The members of the catalogue were playwrights: PINTER, MILNE, COWARD, YEATS, SHAW, ARDEN, WILDE, SYNGE, FLETCHER, ORTON, IBSSEN. Having donated a letter, each was anagrammed to form a word in the perimeter of the diagram.

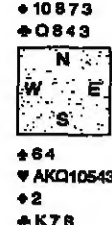
The winner is Gordon Johnstone, of Alnwick, Northumberland. The runners up are John M. Brown of Rolleston-on-Dove, Staffordshire; J.R.C. McGlashan of Selsey, West Sussex; Robert Trees of Berwick-upon-Tweed, Northumberland; Stewart Fowle of Edinburgh; D.J. Tomlinson of Carshalton, Surrey.

BRIDGE

by Robert Sheehan

ONE OF the key matches of the 1997 General European Championship was that between The Netherlands and Italy. The Netherlands eventually finished sixth, narrowly missing the last qualifying spot for the Bermuda Bowl. The Dutch declarer might have improved his team's chances on this hand:

Dealer West East-West game IMPs

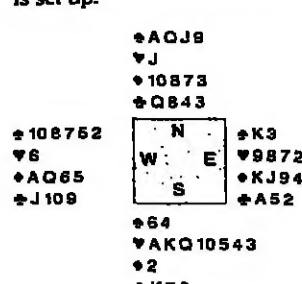


Contract: Four Hearts by South.
Lead: the jack of clubs

After three passes, South opened Four Hearts and was left to play there. He ran the jack of clubs lead to his king, and played ace and king of hearts. West followed once and discarded a spade on the second round, with dummy discarding a diamond. On the next two hearts both dummy and West discarded a spade and a diamond. What should declarer do now? In practice he took a spade finesse; East won and put his partner in with a diamond. West switched back to clubs and the defence took two club tricks to beat the contract. The full deal is shown in the next column.

Do you see what South should have done after drawing trumps? Playing clubs would have been no better — the defence can always arrange for West to play a spade

through before the thirteenth club is set up.



The editor of the Championship bulletin, Jean-Paul Meyer, pointed out that South should have edited with a diamond. That is a communication-cutting play. If West wins and attacks clubs, declarer plays the queen and eventually sets up a club trick with the defence unable to set up a spade trick. If West plays a spade, declarer finesesses and the defence only gets one club trick. And if East wins and returns a diamond, declarer ruffs and plays clubs himself, again putting on the queen.

As the play went, East-West did well to cash their tricks — if they had tried to take a second diamond that would have been fatal. I presume that on the first club East played the two — this being a "count" situation. Thus West knows that there are definitely two clubs to cash.

It would be more difficult if East's clubs were say, A 7 6, but he plays the six on the first round and the seven when declarer ducks the nine of clubs, thus showing that he started with three.

● The Times Book of Bridge 1 by Robert Sheehan is available from bookshops or from BT Bookford (01376 321276), at £6.99 plus £1 p.p.s.

WORD WATCHING

Answers from page 32

RECALESCENT
(c) Glowing with heat again, temporarily, at a stage in the process of cooling down from white heat. From the Latin for "heating up again".
FARCEUR
(c) Strictly speaking in the French, the writer or actor of farces.
MEGAPOD
(b) With enormous feet, from the Greek.
APORIA
(b) Patently insincere professions. A term of Roman rhetoric.

CHESS

by Raymond Keene

THE World Chess Federation, Fide, has devised a new plan to determine the World Championship. It will be a 100-player knockout with the final stages to be held in the Olympic Museum at Lausanne in January next year. However, what the chess world wants to see is a one-to-one clash between Kasparov, the world champion, and Vladimir Kramnik, who has repeatedly demonstrated his tactical ingenuity and a psychological toughness. A World Championship between the two would be fascinating. This week's game shows Kramnik against one of the world's most feared attacking players.

White: Vladimir Kramnik; Black: Alexei Shirov
Tilburg, September 1997
King's Indian Defence

1 Nf3 Nf6 2 d4 g6
3 Nc3 Bg7 4 e4 d6
5 d5 Nxd5 6 Bc4 Nc6
7 Qd2 Qc7 8 Qd3 Nf6
9 Nf5 Nf4 10 Bf3 Qc7
11 Ng5 Nf4 12 Bf4 Qc7
13 Bf3

White has surrendered the bishop pair. However, Black's kingside has been weakened by pawn advances and the square e6 beckons to a white knight.

13 ... Bf6 14 Nf6 Bf6
15 Qd3 Bf6 16 Bf3 Bf6
17 Bf3

Black now has an extra pawn, but White's pieces are well mobilised and the passed pawn on e6 proves a constant danger.

17 ... Bf6
Black's extra pawn cannot be held, so Shirov returns it in order to undermine White's own king's safety.

18 fxe3 fxe3 19 Rxe3 c6
20 Qd2 d5 21 cxd5 cxd5
22 Qd4

Black resigns
Not only is Black a pawn down but his king is hopelessly exposed to threats such as Rb3+ and Bc4.

WINNING MOVE
By Raymond Keene
Chess Correspondent

White to play. This position is from the game Reti - Flamberg, Abbazia, 1912.
Here White has played in classical gambit style, sacrificing a rook for the attack. He now has the opportunity to crown his efforts with a fine finish. Can you see it?
The first correct answer drawn on Thursday will win a year's subscription to the Staunton Society. The answer will be published next Saturday.

Solution to last week's competition:
1 ... Qx5

It is important to prevent Black from freeing himself with ... Qb6. The text also sets a diabolical trap with a most beautiful sting in the tail, namely 22 ... Nf5 23 Qe5 Nf6 24 e7 Rf6 25 Rf1 Qd7 26 Rf3 Rf8 27 Qb6+! Kf8 28 exd6 Qxh4.

22 ... Qd6 23 Qe5
Black sees through White's machinations, but now that his tactical defence has failed, White's heavily supported passed pawn becomes the dominant factor.

23 ... Qd4 24 Rf3
And not 24 Qe7 on account of 24 ... Qf2+ 25 Kh1 Qd1+ when the tables are decisively turned.

24 ... Qd5 25 Rf7 Rf7
26 exd7+ Kd7 27 Qc7
Kramnik has decided, at first sight somewhat surprisingly, to transform the advantage of the passed pawn into one of mobility of attack against both Black's king and his queenside pawns.

27 ... Qd4 28 Rf3 Qxb4
29 ... Qd4 30 Qxb7 Rf8
31 Qa7 d4

White was threatening Bb5. This attempt to regain the initiative now allows White's bishop to enter the fray from a different direction.

32 Bc4 Kf8 33 g3 Qg4
34 Bc2

Now all is clear. Black can no longer stay in contact with his pawn on d4.

34 ... Qc8 35 Qxd4 Qc1+
36 Kg2

Black resigns
Not only is Black a pawn down but his king is hopelessly exposed to threats such as Rb3+ and Bc4.

WINNING MOVE
By Raymond Keene
Chess Correspondent

White to play. This position is from the game Reti - Flamberg, Abbazia, 1912.
Here White has played in classical gambit style, sacrificing a rook for the attack. He now has the opportunity to crown his efforts with a fine finish. Can you see it?
The first correct answer drawn on Thursday will win a year's subscription to the Staunton Society. The answer will be published next Saturday.

Solution to last week's competition:
1 ... Qx5

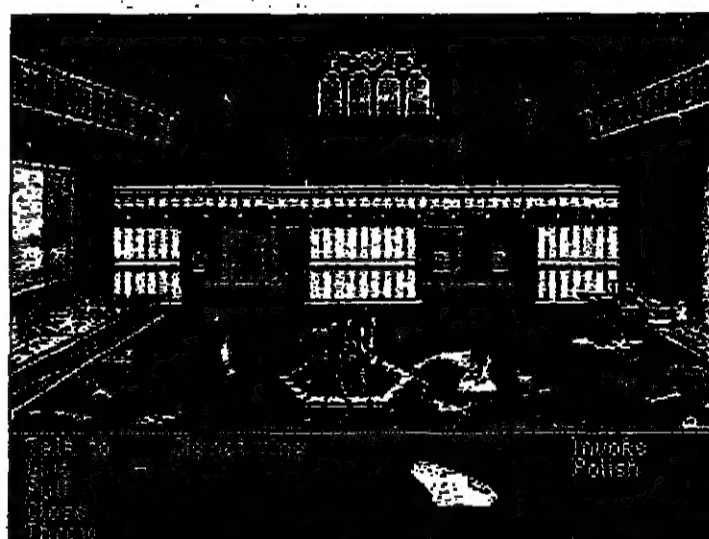
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COMPUTER GAMES AND PASTIMES

by Tim Wapshott



Prima Leisure's 3 plus 1 series offers four games for £2.99

Rom has one main title and three lesser games, all running on Windows or DOS and all Windows 95 compatible.

Admittedly some creak a little, although at just 63.5p each this should be forgiven. Lurking in the collection are many oldies but goodies, like the original war combat sim Campaign, or Champ-

all — by answering the following question: Campaign is a game about a) the making of a Spice Girl television commercial, b) military precision on the battlefield, c) getting the Tories back into power. Send your answer on a postcard, with your name, age, address and home telephone number, to Cyberspace Thirty-Seven, Computer Games and Pastimes, Weekend, The Times, 1 Pennington Street, London E1 9XN. The first three correct entries out of the mail bag on Thursday (October 30) will win.

There was an enormous response to Cyberspace Thirty-Six, hardly surprising with three Kodak digital cameras on offer. You had 100 words in which to describe your favourite picture or photograph, so those who only sent their names and addresses must consider themselves disqualified. Otherwise, the imagery and emotion flowed from your collective pen. For Ray Kennedy of Exeter, his most cherished photograph was taken in Iceland during the Second World War. Black and white and barely in focus, it is of the bow-wave of "fellow battleship" HMS King George V. "The picture is a dull symphony of greys with one touch of white, yet this relic conveys the

dreariness and universal colourlessness that are still strong in my memory," he wrote. He recalls the sense of excitement when he took it, coupled with "pangs of guilt that I was probably offending against King's Regulations".
Nia Jones of Swindon treasures a snap of her dog during a country walk, sitting alert on a tree stump. "Her shiny black fur, fluffy from a recent bath, is gold-edged, caught by the late afternoon sun," she said. "Her pink tongue lolls in a smiling mouth, her black eyes gaze with devotion. She awaits the command that will send her gambolling along the beech-wood path to home."
More entries next week.

TWO BRAINS ANSWERS

Solutions to the questions on page 32

Question 1: 104. Successive numbers are obtained by adding 0, 1, 8, 27. The next number in this sequence (the numbers are cubes) is 64 + 0 + 1 + 8 = 73.
Question 2: Rio de Janeiro is the only city in the Southern hemisphere.

LATEST SOFTWARE

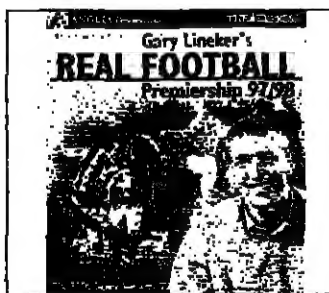
GARY LINEKER'S Real Football Premiership 97/98 is a soccer fanatic's delight. The former England captain fronts a solid four reference title with a sizeable database which can easily be brought up to date as the season unfolds.

The title, developed by Definition Digital Media and released by Anglia Multimedia, features full squad profiles for all Premiership clubs together with aerial photographs of each club's grounds, transport and ticket booking information and a fun trivia section. Pick your favourite team when the Windows 95 CD-ROM first loads and it will then track its progress. Also excellent for pondering endless what-if analyses during the season. As this unfolds you can update the database manually, inputting results yourself, or using the hot-link facility to a dedicated Internet website where weekly fixture information can be downloaded in one go to automatically bring your database bang up-to-date.

The historical archive is a treasure trove of information, with match-by-match reports of the last season, based on coverage which originally appeared in the Daily Express. Summaries by Lineker also take you through the more famous games.

The title is overrun with detail yet slips up occasionally with unlikely vagaries — for example, the old football photographs featured have no captions. Still, here are all the football results you could currently want on one disc. Verdict: 7 out of 10. Fascinating football fact fountain. £29.99.

IF YOU have ever fancied yourself



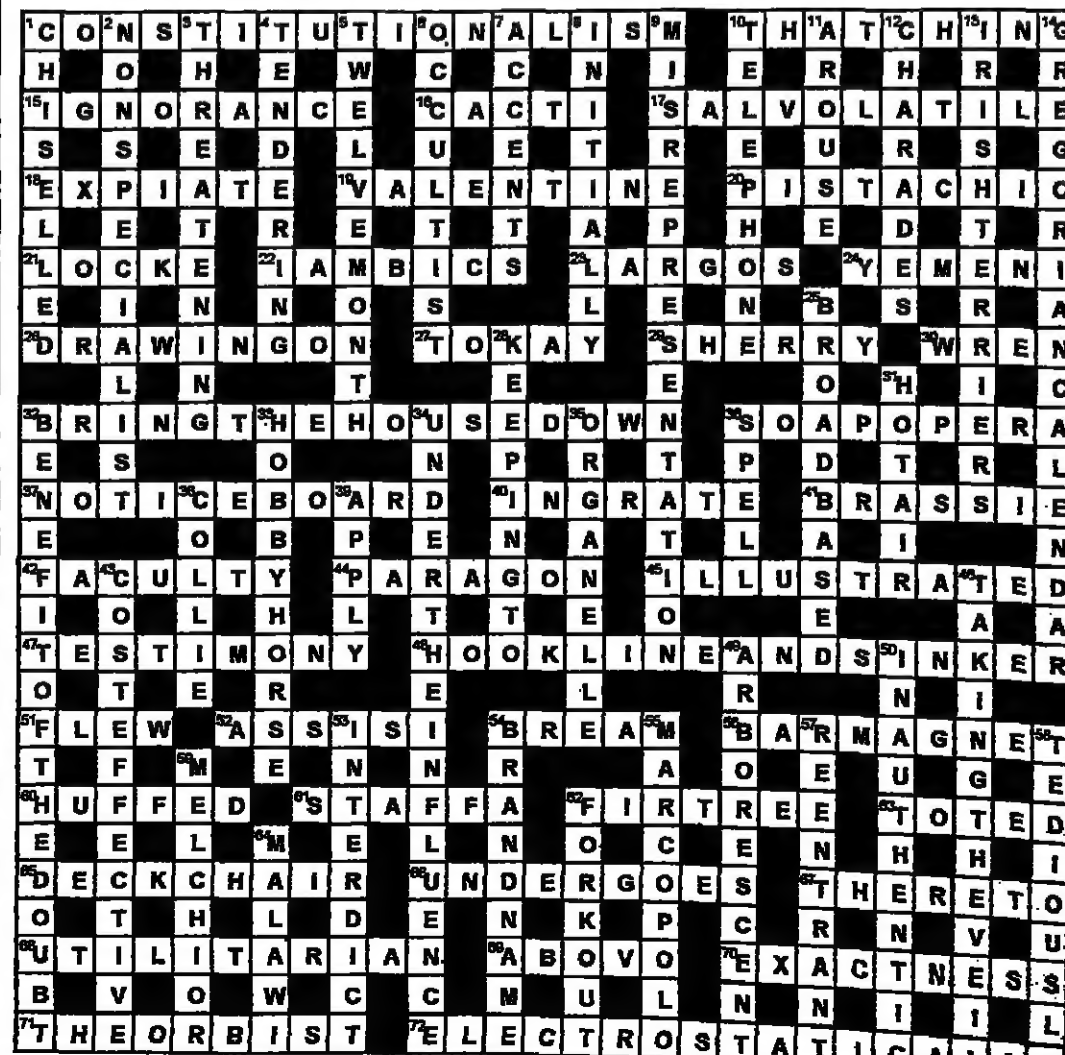
Lineker scores with this one

as an opportunist landlord then Contractor could be the challenge you are looking for. Here you employ workmen to erect and man timber mills and cement factories then get to work building homes, police stations and even pawnshops to further fleece your unfortunate tenants.

Starting with a flat plot of land, you decide what goes where. First you must ensure the supply of wood and concrete to fuel your embryonic urban nightmare. Next come homes, starting with grotty little boxes and rising to palatial mansions. Your work gangs can also be put to use improving interiors — bedrooms, bathrooms, sitting rooms and kitchens — to attract a better class of tenant willing to meet higher rents.

Playing solo, other computer property tycoons attempt to undermine your business plan, as do thieves and vandals. Two to four human players can compete in network mode. The title, from Acclaim, looks terrific but lacks a decent tutorial facility. It loads through DOS. Verdict: 8 out of 10. Build an empire with bricks and mortar. £39.99.

SOLUTION TO JUMBO 131



The winner of an Alfred Dunhill AD2000, worth £105, is R.M. Kirby, of Exeter in Devon

